

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1834.—VOL. LII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING NOVEMBER 24, 1888.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["I BELIEVE YOU," LILIAN WHISPERED, "AND—I LOVE YOU!"]

A DESPERATE DEED.

CHAPTER I.

A YOUNG girl, the daughter of a proud and noble race, came down the wide old stair of Woodville Honour, the seat of Sir Stuart Woodville, looking like a spirit as she came down the wide old stair. For she was all in white, some thick, soft stuff brodered here and there with threads of silver, which trailed behind her in rich, full folds; and though the rounded arms were covered, the square-cut corsage revealed the fair, satiny flesh, which gleamed like pearl against ivory. And she had a cluster of glossy-leaved, crimson-berried holly (for it was the season that brought "Peace on earth to men of good will") in her hair, and a quaint girdle of beaten silver about her slim waist, and nothing at all in the slender, snowy, ringless hands.

Very good indeed was she to look at, this daughter of Sir Stuart Woodville, with her small, graceful figure, her sweet, regular-featured, demure yet piquant face, with its rose-red lips and dusky, braided hair; as charming a woman

as one would wish to see, though to be sure she was hardly a woman at all yet, for she was only nineteen one short month ago.

The lamps in the great hall had just been lighted—a handsome old hall it was, too. Handsome is just the word which describes it, for though it was neither imposing nor magnificent, it boasted a marvellous Mosaic floor, and walls which were famous for the exquisite carving of their dark-oak dados.

To the right, directly opposite the octagon arch, which led into the drawing-room, stood a broad, low mantle, beneath which a mass of red sea-coal burned like a bed of rubies. A great tiger skin was stretched before it, and on either side were curious, old, straight-backed, low-seated, Cathedral chairs.

"Marguerite!" she called, and paused at the foot of the shallow steps, just where the light from a quaint Moorish lantern fell full upon her little, high-held head and pretty creamy gown. "Marguerite, dear!" she called again.

And still no answer.

Warmth there was in the hall, and the glow of dim, brazen lamps, and silence save for the crackle of the crimson fire.

Lilian Woodville passed lightly over to the octagon arch, from which depended portieres of dull-hued tapestry. She pushed them apart—went in.

The room, delightfully antiquated and furnished in the style of a century before, was well lighted, and here, too, a royal fire leaped under the queer, projecting mantle of yellow marble.

By the hearth, leaning towards the friendly blaze, as though she were cold, a girl sat—crouched rather, for her elbows were on her knees, and her face hidden in her clasped hands.

"Well, I declare!"

She dropped her hands, looking up, with the ejaculation, as her sister approached.

She surveyed her coolly from head to foot.

"You look quite—what shall I say?—quite brilliant, Lily. May I ask if this style is in honour of our noble guest?"

The other flushed hotly at the mocking words.

"You seem to forget it is Christmas Eve, Marguerite; that we have more than one guest coming to-night, and that I always dress for papa."

Marguerite sighed. The scornful look died wearily out of her face. She rose slowly.

"Yes, of course. I didn't mean to be cantankerous," and she laughed.

Lilian stood quite still, and looked at her searchingly. Something in the laugh had jarred on her, so dry as it sounded, so bitter.

They were sisters—twin-sisters—and alike, so wonderfully alike. The same small, graceful figures; the same proud carriage of the head; the same delicately-cut features; the same large grey eyes, shaded by long, dark lashes; the same short, pretty, mischievous mouths.

But Marguerite was fairer than her sister, and her hair was not black, as was Lilian's, but a soft and sombre brown.

Just now, though, the resemblance was not so remarkable as usual, for the girl in the soft, white gown, with the medallioned girdle around her waist and the holly in her hair, and the full throat and bosom showing bare and white, looked younger and prettier than she who stood by the mantle, in her much-splashed riding-habit, her hair dishevelled by the wind, her face drooping on her hand.

Suddenly Lilian went up to her, caught her by the shoulders, turned her round, forced her to face her.

"Marguerite, what is it? What has come over you? What has changed you? The summer before last, when we came home from school, you were gay as a lark. You danced over the house from morning till night; you sang till you deafened me. And now—"

"Now I am older; now I have sense. I no longer deafen any one, nor do I require new slippers as frequently as used the old Marguerite."

"But I loved the old Maggie best!" her sister cried. "You have never been like her since that time you went up to London to visit Aunt Eliza."

"Do you think Aunt Eliza had a depressing effect?" Marguerite asked, twinkling her pretty nose.

"Don't joke about it!" hotly. "Then in April—last April—you went away again, and you came back gloomier than ever. And now—now you sit over the fire, moaning and brooding—yes, you do!—without stirring, by the hour. And then you have Starlight saddled, and you rush off for a crazy ride across country; and come home exhausted, and throw yourself down in your room and sleep—or pretend to—till dawn another day of frowning reveries and frantic rides. And you have grown so hard and—cold, and—Oh, Maggie darling—"

The sweet, quick young voice—the protesting, impetuous speech—broke down completely.

Marguerite's lips quivered. Something like a flash—tender, gentle, loving—swept over her face; then it was gone.

Her eyes were very clear and bright, her lips smiling a trifle contemptuously, when she met her sister's tearful gaze.

"I! You must be dreaming, Lilian. Your nerves are out of order. What thrilling romance have you been reading? You must make Mrs. Allan give you some sherry and quinine. There is papa! I must run and dress for our high and mighty visitor. You dear—silly—little goose!"

And with a light kiss for each word, Marguerite gathered her long skirts in her ungloved hand, flung it over her arm, and ran out of the room and up the stairs.

"Lilian!"

"Yes, papa."

She swallowed a big lump in her throat and turned as he came in—a silver-haired, kindly-faced old gentleman, clad in irreproachable evening costume.

He was erect and supple for his years, and his bristling brows and moustache were not as white as his hair. He had dim, blue eyes, an old-fashioned stateliness of manner, and hands which were patrician to the finger-tips.

"Where is Marguerite?"

"Gone to dress for dinner."

He drew out his watch.

"It is an hour since the carriage went to the station; he should soon be here."

Lilian leaned over him curiously as he sat in a big damask-covered chair.

"He is an old friend of yours, papa?"

"The Earl? Dear me, no, child! His father was an old friend of mine. Why, I am sixty-five,

and he—well, he can't be much more than a boy."

"But he is a widower, papa."

"Yes, yes; but that doesn't make him old. He was only twenty-one when he married, and his wife died within a year. He—Ah, there he is!"

Without was the sound of wheels—of a carriage stopping.

They heard the front door flung open. Sir Stuart started forward with hand cordially outstretched, for the portieres had been pushed back, and a man clad in travelling attire, fur-capped and snow-flaked, stood between—a tall, bronzed, handsome giant of a fellow.

"Sir Stuart, of course?" he remarked, as he stepped in.

"My dear boy, yes! A thousand welcome. Harold, this is one of my little girls. Lily, dear, the Earl of Silverdale."

She gave him her hand with frank grace.

"You are very welcome," she said.

He looked down on her from his great height, his Saxon face full of warm approval.

What a very, very pretty little thing she was! so shy and yet so self-possessed. And what a beautiful, true look the luminous grey eyes held!

"Thank you!" responded the Earl. "You are more than kind to let me come to you. This is my first Christmas in England for ten years."

And just then, looking like another Lilian—fair, fresh, smiling, dressed in soft, dull-blue silk, with some exquisite point-de-Alençon at the breast and a silver arrow in her hair—came Marguerite Woodville.

The Earl started, looked from her to Lilian and back again.

Sir Stuart laughed.

"You think the resemblance marvellous—most people do at first. Marguerite, my dear, the Earl of Silverdale. But Lilian's hair is black—Marguerite's brown."

He bowed low before her. Then their eyes met. What was there in that careless, courteous glance of his to send the quick carnation to her cheek? What was there in her swift, dark, sad look to chill him so subtly but unmistakably?

"By Jupiter!" he said to himself, "if I believed in premonitions—but I don't!"

An hour later a gay party gathered around the glittering board. The gleam of the silver, the glow of the scarlet holly, the sparkle of the wines, were not bright as the murmurous compliments, the languid, brilliant wit. And their laughter floated merrily and mellowly out into the frosty night. And blithe of all were the beautiful daughters of the host.

And little they dreamed that night was the beginning of it all—of the hope and the doubt, of the gladness and the sorrow, of the desperation which begot deceit. The beginning of a noble love, of a sin as black as night, of a torture more bitter than death—the beginning of a mystery impossible to comprehend—of a tragedy terrible to contemplate.

CHAPTER II.

"A HAPPY New Year!" the Earl said.

"A happy New Year!" she laughed back at him.

The morning sun was streaming into the breakfast-room of the Castle. Everywhere the bright rays darted; over the quaint-carved chairs, the black-polished floor, the dull red walls, the daintily appointed table, the sideboard heavy with massive crested silver, the branches of holly above the mantle, the bowl of hothouse roses on the table—touched, too, the sweet face of Lilian Woodville as she dropped the damask curtain and turned from the window.

How pretty she was! He had told himself so dozens of times, to be sure, in the last week, but that did not alter the fact at all. So was Marguerite pretty; they were feature for feature exactly alike. In the dusk, or even were the room not very bright, a mistake as to identity was more than probable; indeed, it had often occurred.

He was very handsome, as has been said—the Earl of Silverdale—tall, large-limbed, square-shouldered; a great traveller, a splendid sports-

man, an accomplished linguist. Add to all this the fact that he was fabulously, absurdly wealthy, and you will understand how he became the shining mark at which ambitious mammas directed their social target, and toward which blushing debutantes sped their finest arrows.

And now, after many a year of freedom, of serene immunity from lovers' sighs and lovers' longings—after days of adventure and nights of peril, after lingering under the shadow of the Sphinx, and hunting elephants in Africa, and buying curios in Damascus, and revelling in the brilliancy of Paris—after meeting many noble women and fair women, and just as lightly parting from them, he had come down to this old castle in Warwickshire and fallen head over ears in love with a little, dark-haired maiden, whose big, grey, tender eyes had taken his heart by storm.

"A happy New Year to me!" he repeated, coming up to her where she stood on the hearth-rug, and looking down on the little figure in the crimson cashmere adfetter with satiny brows. "I think you will have to decide that, Lilian."

"I!"

She looked up at him suddenly—startled. Then a quick, hot wave of rose swept from under the linen collar to the clustering little rings upon her forehead.

He was nearer forty than thirty, this brown-eyed, brown-bearded nobleman, and if he wasn't quite as devoid of speech as a younger man might be, he was still very sincere and very fervent.

And though Lilian saw all this, so intense was her surprise she was silent.

"Perhaps you think because I have a daughter nearly as old as myself, I have no right to ask you to marry me. But there is one thing as true as heaven—I have never loved till now. It seems incredible that after all these years of indifference I should grow hot and cold at the sound of a young girl's voice—the touch of her gown as she passed me. But it is true."

"Yet," she began, "you—"

Her heart was beating tumultuously.

What could she say? This was her first proposal. She was very glad that she knew, and—yes, a little frightened.

"I married—yes. I was a boy—just twenty-one. The marriage had been arranged by our parents when we were children. I liked her in a brotherly sort of way. I went to her—I had made up my mind to tell her the compact must be broken. Her mother said she was very delicate—the shock might kill her. I saw her, however, and she—oh, I hate to say it!—turning impatiently away to the window, and stalking back again, 'It sounds so like a cad; but—well, I saw she cared for me, and I could say nothing. We were married. She died within a year.'"

Silence, save for the crackling gossip of the fire in the grate.

The girl glanced up. He was regarding her gravely.

She moved forward a step; she laid her clasped hands against his breast.

"I believe you," she whispered, "and—I love you!"

"My darling!" he murmured.

"Hark! there was a rap at the door."

"Come!" Lilian called.

She walked forward.

"I was told to give you this, miss," one of the maids said, holding out a grayish, greasy-looking envelope.

And then she disappeared.

Lilian looked doubtfully at the missive. It bore no address. The odour it diffused was unpleasantly suggestive of the stables.

She opened it, took out the half sheet of paper it contained, and read the following, scrawled in pencil:—

"Marguerite: Meet me at the vacant lodge to-night. Bring me what I want, or I will strike the Earl for a hundred. 'Twould be worth that to him."

What did it mean? What in the name of Heaven was it all about? Who had dared write to her sister in this fashion? And Marguerite, who had always been so proud! Lilian could not understand it at all.

The blood had gone back to her heart with a rush. She stood there in the golden-morning sunshine, quite still and rigid.

The Earl's voice roused her.

"Have you had bad news? You are white as a ghost, dear. Can I help you?"

"No, no!" crushing the letter into her pocket, and forcing her pale lips to smile. "Nothing of importance. Ah, here is Bessie!"

How glad she was to see Miss Tennyson's saucy blonde face! It was Marguerite's secret, she told herself feverishly. Not hers—not the Earl's—only Lorraine's.

"Down before me, Lillian—happy New Year! Good morning, Sir Stuart. I'm hungry as a hunter; and where is Marguerite?"

A quick step came along the hall.

"Talk of angels! I've been for a walk, while all you lazy folks are dozing. How do you feel, papa? A happy New Year, Aunt Clara."

She was looking very brilliant and pretty, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling from her brisk walk in the frosty air.

She took off her bird-breasted hat and kid-gloves, and sat down to breakfast in her trim walking costume of golden-brown cloth and fur.

There was quite a gay party gathered at the Castle. An Indian officer home on furlough; an Australian heiress, visiting for the first time the country of her parents; the major of a crack London regiment; a wealthy Irish widow and her bewitching little daughter. The merriest of them all this bright New Year's morning was Marguerite Woodville. Lillian watched her furtively, half-fearfully.

She was so full of moods of late; now silent, sullen, full of bitterness; again—and this certainly seemed like acting, it was so extreme, capricious, excitable—jesting, laughing, answering every rally of wit with a flash of humour or of satire, "sharp and keen as steel."

"I want to speak to you, Marguerite," said Lillian.

It was an hour later, and the sisters stood alone in the upper hall.

"Come into my room. Well?"

Lillian put her hand in her pocket, drew out the note.

"Another blunder because of our likeness, dear. The servant who gave me this evidently thought she was giving it to you. I did not know—I read it."

Marguerite crimsoned. She snatched the paper—glanced over it.

"What are you going to wear to the Hazeltones' ball?"

Lillian was thunderstruck.

"Marguerite!"

"I asked you what you were going to wear to the Hazeltones' ball?"

"But that note!" Lillian protested, feeling cold and choked. "Who wrote it—who *dared* write so to you?"

Marguerite laughed, the low, bitter laugh her sister had come to dread.

"Don't you think that is my affair? I do. I would advise you to wear pink. I'm going to try and get a sleep now. I was up before six. So—hoping you will pardon the abrupt termination of this audience—"

She pushed her gently into the hall, and locked the door.

Lillian stood aghast. Marguerite had never acted so—*never*! Was she crazy?

Her eyes filled with tears of fright, mortification, dismay. She ran down stairs, caught up a shawl, flung it over her head, hurried through the library, opened a side door leading into the garden, sped down the steps and across the snow to a little Chinese pagoda which had been her favourite retreat since she was a child.

She wanted a place, time, chance, to think it out. No one would disturb her here. It was a lovely day for the first of January, blue-skied, sunshiny, almost warm.

She sat down at the round table, laid her arms upon it. Her head, shrouded in the scarlet shawl, dropped low.

Who could have written that note? Did it explain all that was mysterious about Lorraine of late? She was too young to have had any lovers, admirers even—*wait!*

Vividly—a very glare of light—a recollection flashed upon her.

On their return from school, their father had given each a fine saddle-horse. And the liveried groom who had ridden at a respectable distance behind them, he had seemed to adore Marguerite. But, pahaw! he would not presume. He was very handsome though, tall, slender, brigandish-looking, with a black moustache. And once she had seen him pick up a flower Marguerite dropped, and once she saw him kiss the glove caught upon the pommet—while Marguerite pretended not to see. Oh, a stream of horrible doubts, memories rushed in upon her.

"Did you get my note? I'm stone broke. I'd a deuced sight rather have you than the cash, but—"

Lillian started violently. In her absorption she had not heard the step, till a hand, closed fiercely on her shoulder, an insolent voice spoke in her ear.

She sprang up, white with anger, quivering in every nerve.

Before her stood a man attired in the livery of a groom, corduroy knee-breeches, light coat with crested buttons, and jockey-cap; a diabolically good-looking chap, brown-skinned and flashing-eyed.

"What do you want?" she panted.

She was not conscious she spoke at all.

"You!"

Just one word, but brutally said.

As she flung back her head, the lightning of her indignant eyes glittering over him, the shawl she wore slipped to the floor.

"The deuce!" he cried.

He fairly jumped backward. The next instant he was bowing before her, abashed, humble, full of penitence.

"You must forgive me—I did not know it was you, Miss Lillian!" he stammered, apologetically. She bowed coldly.

"Go!"

He skulked away.

She hurried home, her cheeks on fire, her brain in a whirl.

The fellow had not said for whom he had mistaken her. There could be only one, for had he not persisted in his error even when he had seen her face? And had he any right to speak so to Marguerite, her proud, lovely sister? Oh, the thought was terrible!

But she must meet and mingle with her guests, and tell the nervous incapable aunt who lived with them absolutely nothing, and look forward to the evening with a consuming dread.

She could hardly think of her own sweet love-dream—her gallant betrothed.

Poor Marguerite! how had she put herself in this man's power? Once she went to her sister's door and knocked.

"Let me in. It is only I—Lillian."

And back came the sweet, mocking, drowsy voice:

"I am asleep. Please don't wake me. Go away!"

The Earl of Silverdale, meeting his affianced in the corridor, remarked her pallor, her suppressed excitement.

"Come for a drive, darling. I haven't had a chance to say a word to you yet."

She gave him a look full of love, but drew away her hands.

"No, no—not now! My head aches."

And she hurried away. He did not see her again for some hours.

He rode into the village to post some letters and visit a friend.

When he returned the yellowish winter dusk was lying dim and cold over the abbey park, and above the stars were glimmering out, frosty and golden.

He went up the shallow, dragon-guarded stone steps to the great doors. He turned a handle. It yielded. He was in the vestibule.

"I don't hear the clink of china," he considered. "Kettledrum must be over."

And sure enough when he opened the other door and passed into the hall, he saw that it was deserted.

Those who gathered there every evening to sip their fragrant souchong tea had vanished to dress.

The lamps were not yet lighted. The fire had burned down and glowed dull and ruddy.

He went on down the hall, his riding boots making a tremendous clatter, when he noticed a figure sitting in a queer, three-cornered chair near the hearth and just out of the reddish disk of light.

He stopped short. His heart gave a great, glad leap.

He knew her now. There was no mistaking the slender little figure in the trailing white gown, the dainty, stag-like head.

She had missed him. She was waiting to have a word alone with him—his dear little love.

She glanced up as he strode toward her, looking gigantic in the dim light.

Bar-headed, fur-coated he stooped, caught her hand in his.

"I wonder if you know how I love you?" he whispered, passionately. "Can it be only one week ago I saw you first? It seems as though I had always known you—always loved you. Why, here I've been haunting the light in your window, and losing my head when you sang, and touching a book because you laid it down—in short, with a low, happy laugh, 'making a most thundering idiot of myself. And you—I wonder if you care for me at all, you little white witch!'"

She rose. What was he saying? The firelight and the shadows danced fantastically before her. Life, reason, seemed slipping from her.

Overwhelmingly clear, dazzlingly clear, one fact alone stood forth—he loved her.

"How much?" he entreated, quizzically.

The words which Shakespeare has put in Mark Antony's mouth came to her.

"There's a beggary in the love that can be reckoned!" she quoted, hoarsely.

She remembered nothing except his presence.

"And," lower still, "you love me like that?"

Was she going mad?

"With all my heart and soul!"

He caught her in his arms.

"My love, my own, my little Lillian!"

"Lillian!"

With a stifled shriek she tore herself free, rushed along the hall, flashed lightning-like up the stairway—vanished.

Blankly the Earl of Silverdale looked after her.

Then, thunderstruck with comprehension, consternation, he ground an oath between his teeth.

"Marguerite!"

CHAPTER III.

TINK-A-LING-LING-LING!
"There's dinner!" cried Bessie Tennyson, gaily. "Oh, blessed sound!"

"We may live without love. What is passion but pining?"

But where is the man who can live without dining?"

quoted Sir Stuart, solemnly.

"Very true indeed!" nodded Aunt Clara, gravely. "And I do wish the children would be more prompt. Yesterday the fish was just a shade overdone."

Sir Stuart laughed. His sister's pet weakness was a good dinner, and he knew it.

They were all gathered in the long, low, firelit, waxlight drawing-room, old-fashioned as to furniture, as has been said, but given an air at once homelike and attractive by its rich curtains and portieres, its wide-cushioned window seats, its brass-tiled hearth—more than all by the cheery fire which galloped gloriously up the chimney.

"Here is one of 'the children!'" laughed Major Murray.

Lilian—yes. But Harold, Earl of Silverdale, took a second look to make sure, and then drew a long breath.

"By Jupiter!" he said to himself, recalling his enormous blunder of an hour ago, "a man had better use his eyes in this house, or he'd find himself marrying his sister-in-law instead of his sweetheart, thereby becoming his own brother-in-law instead of—blest if I can say what!"

His eyes, amused, perplexed, adoring, met those of his betrothed.

She flashed him a glance and a smile. "How well he looked in evening dress! Its inky blackness brought out more boldly the golden lights in his beard and hair."

On the breastplate of snowy linen which fashion demands blazed a bit of blue flame, a sapphire of purest lustre.

"Where is Marguerite?" Sir Stuart asked. "Oh, she asked me to make her excuses!" Aunt Clara said. "She is suffering with neuralgia, and unable to leave her room. It is too bad, too," she added, plaintively, "as I know we are to have *vol-au-vent* for dinner, and that is one of her favourites."

Harold felt immensely relieved. He had been dreading the meeting—actually dreading it. Dinner passed off successfully.

Thrilled by the strange happenings of the day, by the presence of her lover—excited by strange, vague fears for Marguerite, remembering the contents of the note—Lilian talked and laughed, and parried skilfully, and with spirit the conversational lances levelled at her.

Her father looked at her in amazement. Usually Lilian was rather quiet. He did not know that she was endeavouring to keep in check her irritating uneasiness concerning Marguerite.

Major Murray quite lost his heart to her that night. And she was a picture, to be sure, with her round, white throat and sweet, flushed young face, blossoming up from the rich velvet dinner-dress, which was just the colour of a Jacqueminot rose.

Once more in the drawing-room, she went directly to the window, and pressed her face to the pane.

The stars had clouded over. It was beginning to rain—a slow, cold rain, which fell like sleet.

She turned away, went out into the hall, up the stairs.

The smell of cigar-smoke reached her from the distant dining-room, and she could hear the clink of glasses.

At Marguerite's door she paused, knocked. No answer.

She pushed it open—passed in. It was deserted.

The waxlights burned brightly on the dressing-table, though the fire on the blue-and-white hearth had died down. A silken scarf lay where Marguerite had thrown it; a book on the floor; a tiny malachite clock ticked on the mantel. The air of desolation, though, was terrifying to Lilian in her intense nervousness.

Marguerite had gone to that rendezvous, then. She had responded in person to that impertinent note; in the cold, in the rain—Lilian could hear it beating against the windows now. And she—the sister who loved her—she must not follow her. Marguerite would think she was spying. Oh, the inaction was maddening!

She twisted her hands cruelly together as she paced the cozy nest of a room up and down.

What was that? A step running lightly up the back stairs, along the corridor—the swish of wet garments.

The door was flung wide open. Marguerite appeared, recoiled at the sight of her sister, then shut the door and came boldly forward.

"Don't devour me, dear," she said, laughingly. "I'm not good to eat."

For Lilian was staring at her, dismay and doubt dimming her eyes.

And no wonder. Her clothes were drenched; her hair had fallen over her shoulders—heavy with rain, it glistened in the waxlight; her cheeks were crimson, her breath coming pantingly, as if from fast running.

"Marguerite!" She came up and clasped her arms about her sister's neck. "Where were you? With whom? Oh, darling, what is wrong with you?"

"Take care—I'm wet—you will spoil your dress!"

But Lilian only held her tighter.

"Marguerite, for our mother's sake!" she pleaded.

With gentle decisiveness the other pushed her away.

"My dear child, I shall never get dressed at this rate," hurrying off her wet attire as she

spoke, "and I must go downstairs. It is New Year's night, you know, and we always have a dance on New Year's night. Here, help me on with this. My neuralgia has disappeared, thanks to my walk! There! now hand me my bronze slippers. Just wait till I twist up my hair. Now my dress; no jewellery. Come!"

Lilian looked at her, breathless. What manner of woman was she? Had she never known her at all till now?

For, except that her cheeks were more glowing, her eyes more dark and brilliant than usual, she looked as she did every evening—fair, serene, artistically clad.

Her gown was of lace, black and clinging, with just a glint of crimson showing here and there as she walked.

Feeling dumb and dazed, Lilian followed her. At the head of the stairs Marguerite turned, put up both her hands, took her sister's face within them, kissed it once, twice.

"There is one kiss for you, and one—for the future Countess of Silverdale!"

And then while Lilian stood still as stone, incapable of movement, more bewildered than ever, Marguerite ran lightly down the broad steps into the brilliant drawing-room and her laughter came sounding up the stairway, ringing and sweet.

CHAPTER IV.

"Is the bride ready?"

"Almost."

"Did any one see my fan?"

"With Lady Patmore's compliments."

"Just the day for a wedding."

"Perfect—yes."

Hither and thither they flew like butterflies—the merry comments, questions, suggestions.

And it was just the day for a wedding, this beautiful morning in June; for everywhere was sunshine, warm, glowing and golden, over the rambling, ivy-covered old abbey, the smooth, green lawn, the low hedges, white with hawthorne—everywhere sunshine and roses and the delicious freshness and fragrance of early summer.

Every door about the Honour stood ajar. Within all was commotion, excitement, for the house was packed with guests wherever one could be disposed of, and

"The lovely London ladies trod
The floors with gliding feet."

An event of no trivial interest was the wedding of to-day. Not only was its importance acknowledged in the great world of fashion. The political position of the groom, his wealth and social standing, gave it peculiar and widespread significance.

The merry bustle grew louder; carriages rolled up the avenue. The coachmen had received their favours. The party was assembling in the hall.

Sir Stuart, calm and high-bred as usual, had come out of the library. And now the six bridesmaids—among them Marguerite, all in pink silk and pearls—came trooping down.

And now the bride! in snowy, glistening trailing satin, simple to severity despite its richness; orange-blossoms in the dark hair, white roses in the little, kidded hands, a veil of fragile and priceless honiton lace over all. Not a speck of colour about her save the wild-rose tint in her cheeks, the crimson in her lips.

She made as lovely a bride and as sweet as a poet could dream of or a king desire.

"Happy is the bride the sun shines on!" laughed Bessie Tennyson.

"My little Lilian, all joy go with you!" her father said, as he kissed her.

And then they were crowding out on the broad steps—gentlemen in the gravity of broadcloth, in the military splendour of scarlet, gold-laced uniforms; ladies clad in all the dainty, brilliant hues, the rare laces, the gleaming jewels of which a marriage of such celebrity authorized the display.

The carriages were filled; sped on. At the little village church, gay with flags and banners and greenery without, banked and carpeted with roses within, Lord Silverdale awaited his bride.

A flutter, a silence, a simple, solemn ceremony.

Then, with burst of music and mad ringing of bells, the Earl and Countess of Silverdale passed out into the flooding sunshine, the cheering multitude, and were driven back to the Abbey.

"I have only one regret to-day, Lilian," said her husband, as they turned in under the arch of roses which spanned the gateway—"the absence of my step-daughter."

How odd it sounded!

"I did not urge her. She has the eccentric, perhaps natural, prejudices girls feel on such a subject, and I am ashamed to say I am almost as great a stranger to her as are you. She is devoted to the sisters with whom she has passed her life, but when she comes home for good next year, she will learn to love you. She cannot help it, sweetheart."

A very brilliant wedding breakfast! Never before had the old dining-room echoed to such musical laughter, such sparkling wit. Toasts were proposed, champagne corks popped; merrily gurgled the golden wine into the shallow glass.

And then the carriage came round. The bride went to change her dress, and came down habited in soft dove-grey, from the plumed hat to the trim, kid boots.

Good-byes were said, a hundred last words spoken, the carriage was entered through a storm of rice.

Bessie Tennyson's pink satin slipper just missed the bridegroom's head, and they were whirled away down the avenue Lilian looking back with a face sweeter than ever, because just a little tearful.

"Letters—for me?"

The beautiful daughter of the Earl of Silverdale turned from the window of the Belgian convent school at sound of the nun's light step—a tall, slender girl, with the air of a princess.

"Yes, dear; two—four. They came while you were away at Lucerne."

"Ah, yes. I wrote papa I was going there with the family of a school friend, but told him to write here as usual. I did not think we would be gone so long."

"Long!" The little, black-robed, white-coiffed sister stood on tip-toe to pat affectionately the girl's fresh cheek. "Indeed, it seemed years without you. The convent always is lonely in vacation, but it seems doubly so when you are not here."

"Thank you, Sister Therese!" she said, smiling.

"And now I must go away and let you read your letters in peace."

And she bustled off.

School had just reopened. This was the recreation hour. From the playground below came the boisterous clamour of young voices, the silvery ring of young laughter.

The sunset light was streaming into the deserted study hall as Lady Iva Romaine leaned by an open casement and read her letters.

From whom was this, addressed in a pretty foreign hand? Ah! the proud lips were compressed for a moment.

"From my stepmother!" she said, with bitterness.

But as she read it, all the dislike, the resentment, died out of her face.

"I am young—not much older than yourself, dear," the letter ran, "and very ignorant. But I hope, I know, we shall be happy together. I would have gone to see you before this, but knew you were travelling with friends. I love you already for your father's sake. Won't you come home soon and give me an opportunity to love you for your own?"

Below, the noisy merriment grew still louder. But the girl in the schoolroom heard it not at all, as she stood lost in thought.

She had dreaded the thought of a stepmother. But perhaps she would cling to her after all. The letter was everything that was kind, simple and sincere.

Look at Iva as she stands there—a good long look.

A marvellously lovely face that, clear cut as a cameo against the rosy sunset light; a very

proud face, too. The pearl-fair forehead clustered over with soft, golden rings; the straight, pretty nose, and round, dimpled chin; the wonderful, luminous eyes, so darkly blue as to be almost black; the geranium-red mouth, with the short upper lip and gleaming teeth; the satiny cheek, with its pink, flickering bloom; the swift, radiant smile—ah, no wonder the convent seemed dull and sad when she was away!

Night fell. The lamps were lighted. Study hour passed. It was time for prayers, then bed.

Two hours later. The great building was dark as the grave—just as silent. See! a reddish glow on the lowest floor. Bright—still brighter! It crept inward, upward. It coiled around the pillars; it writhed along the floor like a snake; it crept up the stairs stealthily, hungrily; it licked the balustrades; it began to belch thick, black vapours.

Hark! with what a queer, crackling sound it stole on. And now it had reached the second landing.

The breath from an open window fanned it. It sprang to the doors, it rushed forward with a sudden roar, fiercely, furiously, luridly it leaped upward.

"Fire!"

Some one in the streets sent the frantic cry outbrilliant.

Bells outpealed; men came hurrying to the spot; ladders, water—all necessary aids were at hand in a twinkling.

Aroused so suddenly, terribly, still half dazed with sleep, within all was confusion. But out of the disorder grew system—out of the panic a certain desperate quietude.

The nuns formed their pupils in the regular file, and calmly gave the necessary orders.

Out on a back porch, down an exposed stairway, two and two they went. Once in the great square below, the superioress began to count her flock.

"Sister Augustine," she cried—"she is not here. Nor Iva—Lady Iva Romaine!"

And just then a wild cry went up from the excited crowd.

For high above them, at an arched window of the old grey building, now hidden by smoke, now clearly revealed by flame, looked a girl's white face.

"Iva—it is Iva!" cried the Mother Superior, in terror. "Save her—quick, the stairway!"

But even as she spoke, with a roar, a crash, a dense black crowd of smoke, the stairway fell!

Then uprose one cry:

"Ladders!"

With magical quickness they were brought and placed against the building. A man ascended—retreated. Another succeeded him—fell back.

"It is no use!" he shouted. "No living thing can pass through that fire!"

It did look terrible, flinging from every window its ragged, crimson banners.

"Stand back, you cowards!" The words rang through the surging masses, over them, clear and commanding as a bugle blast heralding war. "While you chatter your cowardice, a life is in peril!"

There was a tumult in the crowd. It parted to let a man through—a strange figure.

Instantly they knew he was one of the guests from the great masquerade ball being held that night, for he wore the dress of an Italian nobleman of bygone days, all white and rose satin, with clinking sword and plumed hat, and buckles glittering with jewels.

He flung coat and hat to the ground, rushed to the ladder, began to swing himself up—up! Just above him the flame tore out goldenly. Still on—up.

The multitude watched him breathless. He seemed to possess the strength and skill of an acrobat, the lithe sinuousness of a tiger.

Still bravely on! A cheer uprose as he reached the window where the two women stood. There seemed to be some dispute. Finally he lifted out the smaller figure, began his descent. Down at last—burned, begrimed.

Kindly hands grasped his burden. They strove to hold him—to reason with him. He shook them off, as a dog who shakes his ears when he leaps from the water to the land.

Again he sprang for the ladder, again he clambered upwards, again he reached the casement. The girl he had come to save was lying against the window-pane, quite still.

He called. She did not move.

He jumped into the room. A beam had fallen on her arm, pinioning her to the floor.

Below, the understanding that something was wrong above spread, gained ground.

"Come down," they yelled, "or you will both perish!"

For ever fiercer, brighter grew the monstrous yellow tongues which lapped the old convent in their frantic embrace.

He worked—good heavens, how he worked!

He tore at the beam—he dragged it—he put forth all his leonine young strength to move it.

His skin was cracking, his lips parched, his eyes starting from their sockets; but still in the awful sound of falling timbers, in the fearful heat, the smoke, the glare, he struggled on.

One last tremendous effort, which strained every muscle, every nerve, and sent his blood throbbing to his temples—one gigantic, magnificent effort—and the heavy beam was lifted and flung aside!

To stoop over the insensible figure, lift in his arms, step through the sash out on the ledge, was but the work of a moment. Would he reach the ground in safety?

The ladders were charred, burning.

Down—slowly down. And the vast concourse held its breath, as bearing his unconscious burden, himself totting, half-blinded, slowly, painfully he came.

They noticed that he hid the girl's face on his breast as he staggered where the flame was thickest.

Below the second story! Sure, they were safe now.

From a thousand throats uprang a delirious cry of joy. There were wild shouts, waving handkerchiefs, then silence. For with an ominous, creaking sound the ladder had snapped—fallen.

When the Earl of Silverdale arrived in Belgium, in answer to the telegram sent him, he found his daughter lying very quiet, and white and beautiful. Her arm had been broken in the fall—otherwise she was unhurt.

"Why, you are a woman, dear!" he cried, in amazement.

It was over a year since he had seen her. She smiled faintly.

"How did you leave my—my mother?" she asked.

He brightened at the word.

"Not very strong, but very happy, fearful because of your accident, but rejoicing in the hope of having you home soon."

And then he went on to tell about her—her beauty, her goodness, her gay, gentle, loving ways. He was so very much in earnest he touched his daughter deeply.

"I suppose I must fall down and worship her, too, if she is as lovely as all that."

He laughed lightly, tenderly, and bent and kissed her.

"And now I must find this young hero who saved your life, dear. Who is he? Where is he?"

She smiled and shook her head.

"Don't ask me. Ah, here is Sister Therese—ask her!"

And he did.

The brave young man who had saved Sister Augustine's life and Iva's. He was in the hospital. Rather badly burned, yes. And with a dislocated shoulder and broken wrist. Would monsieur go to him?—well.

When, the next morning, the Earl of Silverdale called on his daughter his fair, handsome face was full of excitement.

"I know him, Iva—just think, I know him well!"

The golden head turned towards him.

"Know whom, papa?"

"Your rescuer, dear—the brave boy who saved you. His estates in Sussex join ours. He is very wealthy, very noble, and the handsomest lad you could see in a day's ride!"

"Pardon?"

"Lancel Curzon."

She turned wearily away. After all, what interest did it hold for her?

But many months were not to pass before, looking back, she would recollect where she had first heard the name. The hospital ward with its rows of snowy cots, the dark-robed sisters, the subdued light, the silence, and her own ennui and indifference.

But just then there came to her no inkling, no premonition, that the name she now so coldly heard would one day thrill her, and set her heart beating madly; no presentiment that it would come to be the dearest in all the great wide world to her; no faintest idea nor shadow of forewarning that she would come to dread the owner of the name—to fear, pity, scorn, condemn him, the while—oh, the strangeness of it all!—the while she loved him dearly.

CHAPTER V.

"Do sit down, Marguerite!"

"I can't, Aunt Clara. I am restless to-night. I feel as though something was going to happen." She was walking nervously backward and forward.

She started as a doubled knock came to the front door of the Honour.

"A telegram?" queried her father, looking up from his paper.

She took the yellow envelope from the servant.

"Yes."

"Dear me, I suppose it is a disappointment about those oysters ordered from to'm!" cogitated Aunt Clara.

The purple September gloaming had closed in, and in the library of the Castle the lamps were lighted.

"It is for me, from Lillian. It says:—"

"The convent in Belgium has been burned down. Iva injured. Her father has gone to her. Come to me at once, if possible. LILLIAN."

Sir Stuart rose.

"Can you be ready for the six A.M. train?"

"Of course! I shall go then."

Aunt Clara placidly resumed her knitting.

"I am glad," she said, "Dobyns has not failed to express the oysters."

"Where is the despatch sent from?" Sir Stuart asked.

"The Langham, London."

"Ah, they've got back from Paris, then—probably on their way home!"

And so it proved when the sisters met.

"You are not looking well, Lillian!" Marguerite cried, at sight of her.

In truth, the rounded cheek was thinner than it used to be.

"I have not been very strong. You remember how I used to faint away at school? Well, I had Doctor Black examine my heart lately. It was, as I feared, rather seriously affected."

"Oh, Lillian!"

She was really shocked.

"Yes, dear." She tried to smile. "That is why I wanted you with me."

"How is Iva hurt?"

"Her arm is broken. She would have been much more seriously injured, I believe, were it not for the heroism of some unknown gallant who, when she was pinioned by a beam in the burning building, rescued and bore her out at tremendous personal peril. Harold will, of course, write me all particulars."

An hour later, when they sat by the fire in their luxurious chamber—both in *négligé* and awn's down slippers—Marguerite said, suddenly,—

"Are you happy, Lillian?"

The Countess of Silverdale laughed softly as she unbraided her dusky tresses.

"Perfectly happy, dear. So happy I have a constant fear it cannot last."

"Lillian!"

"Oh, we must not get dreamy! It is only a foolish presentiment, I suppose—no, not presentiment, a fancy, which will vanish with my dear love's coming."

"Her dear love! Was she not indeed happy to have the right to call him so? Marguerite thought blessedly happy?"

"When are you going home?"

Home was a princely mansion lying in the green heart of a Sussex woodland.

"As soon as Harold returns. You must come with us, dear."

They sat and talked.

"Till the fire was out in the chamber there, and the little bare feet were cold."

The following morning the Countess did not feel strong enough to attend church, for it was Sunday, so Marguerite went alone.

Such a fresh, crisp, delightful day as it was! She would walk back. So at the edifice she dismissed the carriage, and after the service started to return to the hotel on foot.

She had gone but a few streets when something, she could never have told what, forced her to look round. As she did so she paled—shivered.

It was as some mysterious power had impressed her—she was being followed. And the tall, slender figure in the loud-checked ulster and round felt hat—bah! how disgustingly familiar it looked. She fairly sickened with recognition.

She hastened on. Once in the hotel, she flung into her sister's room, shut the door.

And then she remembered what Lilian had told her. She must not alarm her.

She faced the Countess, laughing forcibly.

"Just think, I walked home. And so fast," pressing her hands to her hot cheeks. "I am all out of breath."

When dinner had been removed, she proposed what she had all day been choking to suggest:

"Lilian, let us go down to Sussex—privately, I mean—before the Earl returns. You say they are going to give you a magnificent reception. Harold won't care about that now, bringing home Iva ill. Don't you think he would feel happier to find you quietly installed there before him—ready to welcome him and his daughter?"

The sweet, pale face opposite lit up like a child's.

"A happy thought of yours, Marguerite, and a kindly one, dear. I was dreading the pomp, the ostentation of a public reception. We will go as soon as possible."

She rang the bell.

"And as quietly?"

"Of course."

To her maid she gave all directions. Secrecy was to be observed. They would leave on Monday next.

They did so. Halfway to their destination an accident occurred. Of comparatively slight importance, it yet necessitated their remaining at the hotel of a small village till the following day, when an engine would be sent down.

Neither noticed the tall young man in the plaid ulster who left the disabled train as did they, and walked up the street behind the crawling cab.

They retired, exhausted. When they awoke it was to learn that through some error they had not been called, the engine had come and gone, and they were stranded in this desolate little hamlet for another twelve hours.

The day dragged by. Towards evening, Marguerite threw herself down on a lounge in their private parlour. In a few moments she was asleep.

By the window sat the countess. The evening was chilly. She had flung a lace scarf over her head. Time was not long to her just now; she was waiting for Harold.

The sun had gone down. Its yellowish afterglow was still lying over the quiet landscape. A step came along the balcony just without. A shadow fell across her paper.

She looked up. A face was glaring down upon her—a cruel, handsome face, with wrathful, black eyes, a huge, black moustache, and thin, vindictive lips drawn back till the flashing teeth were displayed.

She started up—to cry out. But she could not to save her life utter the faintest sound.

He jerked a revolver out of his hip-pocket, and shook it menacingly.

"Hush!"

She needed no threat. She was literally paralyzed with fear.

He did not mean to use the weapon, coward though he was. But how could she know that? It was simply a bit of his every day bravado; ruffianism in a critical moment asserting itself.

"I followed you, you see. Give me more. She's rich. I'll bet she has given you plenty. It's a pity you didn't catch his lordship. Perhaps he'd have been good enough for you, seeing as how you scorn an honest feller like me!"

The words were fairly hissed—were not above a whisper.

They did not waken the unobserved, recumbent figure.

How heavy she was growing in his rude grasp. Fainting, perhaps.

He roughly released his hold. She fell back in her chair.

"Great Lord! she isn't—"

He dare not think his dread. Her head lay motionless against the chair back. Her face was drawn—white as ashes. Her eyes half open—glaring, sightless. Her lips ghastly—parted.

He laid his ear to her mouth, his hand on her heart.

There was no breath in one, no beat in the other.

He sprang back. His lips formed one fearful gasping word. He looked around wildly. Then he sprang through the window, leaped the veranda, dashed into the shrubbery—fled.

Ten minutes passed—twenty. Some one began to play a jingling piano in the room below. The sound awoke Marguerite.

She sat up.

"Lilian!"

It was quite dark. She rubbed her eyes, rose, groped her way to the mantel, found matches, lit the candles in the brass candlesticks, and turned to her sister.

"Asleep, dear?"

She went toward her, drew down the blind, pulled the curtains to, then bent and shook her.

"It is time for supper, Lilian. You will take cold so near—"

A queer choking cry. She staggered—recovered herself.

Pshaw! Lilian had fainted! But, no! She tore her dress open, and laid her ear over the white breast. Still! almost chilly already—no!

"O, Heaven!" she murmured, "she is dead!"

Dazed, powerless, quivering, Marguerite stood and looked at her in the dull, streaky light.

A scarf of black Spanish lace was wound over the pretty head, which lay so terribly quiet against the back of the rusty chair. Like marble was the face—as white, as cold.

Marguerite grew dizzy. Her eyes drooped.

Ah, what was that—there on the floor—on a fold of her sister's gown!

She stooped, caught it up.

A revolver—a cheap, common, villainous-looking thing.

She rushed to the light, held it up, examined it. Crudeley scratched on the plate were two initials—"R. G."

Great heaven—his! How had he come here?

She was used to firearms—a cousin had taught her. It was, loaded—yes; but no chamber had been emptied. To what might it not lead? She must secrete it, for the present at least. Soon would a gaping crowd gather.

She lifted the lid of her little travelling-trunk, dropped it in, and snapped the spring lock.

Ah! now she knew, now she understood it all! He had followed her, sought an interview, tonight had seen Lilian at the window, mistaken her, approached, threatened her, terrified her. And the threat and the terror, in her delicate state of health, had killed her. What would she do? What could she do?

The room went spinning around and around.

The Countess of Silverdale, with everything to live for—love, husband, position—she was dead! And Marguerite, hunted, disgraced, miserable, had yet to live and face it all—the wretchedness, the shame—

She almost envied the dead woman there. Would she look like that some day?

What thought was it which made her stagger to the floor and lie there shaking, panting? What made her leap up and snatch the half-written sheet which lay on the table and thrust it in her pocket? What made her clutch the dead woman's hands, and tear the rings from them and push them on her own shaking fingers? What made her strip the scarf from the limp head opposite, and wind it tightly around her own? What brought that fierce, wild smile to her glittering eyes—her set and colourless mouth?

"Living, my life would be one long torture! Dead, I may be happy! Living, I should be pursued, degraded! Dead, honoured, safe, loved—and loved by him I love! You are dead—do you hear?" she panted, to the awfully still figure before her. "You—Marguerite Woodville—are dead! I—the Countess of Silverdale—live!"

(To be continued.)

ROSALIND'S VOW.

—*—

CHAPTER XXIX.

HOUSE BY THE RIVER.

On the morning after Vansittart's visit to the White House he got up early, and, entering a hansom was driven in the direction of Chiswick.

Before arriving at his destination he sprang out, paid the driver, and went the rest of the way on foot. He was, as we are aware, a very cautious man, and he knew that cabmen have an inconvenient way of recollecting faces as well as destinations at inconvenient moments; therefore he determined to run no risk. It is true he had done nothing illegal in taking his wife away from the White House, but, for all that, the occurrence was one that he would prefer should not be made public.

The Lodge, as the house was called, was a damp, and not particularly inviting looking place, surrounded by high walls, and with a garden leading down to the river. It had belonged to Vansittart's father, and the son had once lived in it, when, for economical reasons, he had been unable to have rooms in the West-end of London. That, however, was some years ago, and since then the house had been uninhabited save for a housekeeper, and had gradually fallen into a state of lamentable dilapidation. But for its being heavily mortgaged, Vansittart would have sold it years ago. He had several times tried to let it, but without success. As a matter of fact, it was in too lonely and isolated a position to attract tenants, and the high wall that surrounded it, though it kept the grounds private, yet, at the same time, greatly added to the air of loneliness that prevailed.

Vansittart let himself in with a latchkey, and was met in the hall by a tall, dark woman of about forty, who looked as though ten or fifteen years ago she might have been very handsome. The expression of her face was now one of chronic gloom and discontent, which entirely marred the classical regularity of her features, and spoiled the beauty of the sombre black eyes.

"Well!" she said, grimly, without troubling herself to bestow any greeting upon him, "you have played a very charming trick upon me this time, I must acknowledge!"

"Trick upon you! What do you mean?" he demanded, with a frown, as he divested himself of his fur-lined coat, and hung it upon the stand.

"Just exactly what I say, neither more nor less! You think you can do with me what you like—that I am under your thumb as completely as if I had sold my soul to you, and were forced to obey whatever commands you might choose to give me!" she exclaimed, with sombre passion. "But you are wrong. Endurance has its limits, and mine has come to

an end. Either that woman leaves the house to-day or I do!"

Vansittart stared at her in undisguised amazement. "What the devil are you driving at? You know quite well that I was going to bring my wife here directly I could manage it!"

"Your wife! And, pray, how many wives have you?" she demanded, with a sneer.

"How many wives have I? Are you mad to ask such a question?"

"Well," she rejoined, equably, "if the lady upstairs is your wife, then, to my knowledge, you have two."

"The lady upstairs is Nona Vansittart—as you are very well aware. I don't understand all this foolery. I can't make out what induces you to try it on with me!"

It was her turn to look surprised now. His tone and manner seemed sincere, and he was evidently annoyed at her remarks. She turned away, observing—

"Go and see for yourself. The key is in the lock on the outside of the door, so you will have no difficulty in entering."

Vansittart obeyed and went upstairs. He paused for a moment on the landing before turning the key. From within came the sound of hasty, agitated footsteps, as of someone pacing backwards and forwards, endeavouring, by movement, to control an overwhelming emotion. An evil smile came on Vansittart's lips as he listened.

"The bird does not like her cage. I am afraid restraint will be irksome to her," he muttered, and then he threw open the door and stood on the threshold, with his back against it.

A woman turned hastily and faced him—a woman with white cheeks, in which a spot of angry crimson burned, and glorious dark eyes full of passionate resentment. For a moment they stood thus looking at each other without speaking, then a cry of amazement broke from his lips.

"You? Rosalind Hawtreys!"

Rosalind made no reply, but still remained gazing at him with measureless scorn. Her awakening from the stupor caused by the drug that had been administered to her was followed by a period of intense wonder and outraged pride. Of course, she remembered nothing of her abduction, except the sensation of the handkerchief being pressed over her mouth and nostrils; but the fact of finding herself locked in a strange room, in a strange house, partially explained itself, and her suspicions had, not unnaturally, flown to Vansittart as the perpetrator of the outrage. His presence this morning confirmed this idea.

"What in the name of wonder brings you here?" exclaimed Vansittart, when he recovered from his surprise.

"That is a question which you ought to be able to answer without my aid!" she replied, with a desperate effort to conceal her agitation. "Indeed, I was about asking you what was your motive in laying yourself open to a criminal prosecution by bringing me here against my will!"

As she spoke a sudden comprehension of the mistake flashed across Vansittart's mind. He knew, of course, that Rosalind had been staying at the White House, but in his anxiety to secure his wife he had permitted the later love to lead him, thinking that an opportunity for pursuing it would occur later on. He now recollected that Gaston had never seen Nona, and that his instructions were to drag the lady whom he found in the sitting-room, which Vansittart knew to be his wife's, and where he had not supposed it likely Rosalind would be.

He ground his teeth with impotent rage as he saw how fate had foiled him, and it was under the influence of this feeling that his next words were uttered.

"I wish to Heaven you were a thousand miles away!" he exclaimed, savagely. "I had no idea you were here. There has been some infernal blundering. It was Nona I wanted, not you!"

Into Rosalind's face there leapt the light of a great joy—a great relief. She, too, saw how the

mistake might have arisen, and with the gladness of finding that she was the victim of a blunder instead of the deliberate plot she feared, there also mingled a most unselfish joy that the blind woman had not fallen into the trap laid for her.

"Under these circumstances," she said, quietly, though her heart was beating with suffocating rapidity, "you will not detain me here a moment longer, I suppose. I am willing to overlook the indignity offered me if I am permitted to go free now."

"Stop a bit," he returned. "The position is complicated, and wants thinking out. Suppose I open the door, and tell you you are at liberty to depart; what is there to prevent your going to the nearest telegraph office and wiring a warning to my wife that may have the effect of making her leave the White House immediately?"

She was silent, and startled by the subtlety with which he had read her thoughts—for he had accurately expressed her intention, and this her face told him.

"No," he went on, after a moment's pause, during which his eyes never left her face. "I do not think I can set you free at once, Lady Hawtreys. There are so many considerations against it, you see, and"—with a mocking bow—"you will readily understand, in spite of my former ungallant speech, that it is a very great pleasure, for me to welcome you to my roof tree."

"I understand that you are behaving in a manner that is a disgrace to the name of gentleman!" she exclaimed, spiritedly, though his change of tone alarmed her far more than his brusqueness had done. "Sorely you cannot mean what you say? You have made a mistake in bringing me here—which I am willing to overlook on condition that you let me leave this house immediately. If you detain me a minute longer, I will prove to you that your villainy shall not go unpunished."

It seemed as if he were attending less to her words than to the wonderful splendour of her eyes, the lovely carnation of her lips, as she uttered them. The spell which her presence invariably cast upon him was beginning to work again, and he was yielding to its intoxication. Her beauty, as she stood before him in the early morning light, was indeed a revelation. She looked like some Eastern empress, whose majesty has been insulted, but whose very pride keeps her resentment in check.

He laughed softly, as if in derision of her implied threat.

"How will you begin the punishment—what steps should you take?" he asked, with the most insolent nonchalance. "Suppose I elect to keep you here a few days longer, what shall you do?"

"In the first place, to keep me here will be an utter impossibility!"

"As how?"

"Because I am not a dumb creature, and we are not so far away from other habitations as to make it impossible for my cries to be heard."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Try the experiment. I don't fancy you will care to repeat it. As a matter of fact, it would be very unlikely indeed that you would make yourself heard, however loudly you might scream; and even if by chance such was the case, your cries would be attributed to the sad, mental affliction under which my wife is supposed to suffer. You see, I have provided for contingencies. If Nona were here instead of you, I might have to face the same possibility."

There was something horribly convincing in the quiet, cold-blooded tone in which he spoke. Rosalind involuntarily shivered; for, in spite of her bold front, she knew enough of the unscrupulous villainy of the man to fear him and his power. Supplications she felt would be of no avail. The only way in which she could hope to influence him would be by putting clearly before him the risk he ran in trifling with a woman like herself.

"Remember, Mr. Vansittart," she said, sternly, "I am not a child, neither am I a weak girl whom you can intimidate. So far, the wrong you have done me by bringing me here has been involuntary, and—leaving out the question whether you were justified in taking such means for forcing your wife to return to you—I am, as I said before, ready to look over the inconvenience I have suffered at your hands. But each minute that you detain me is an outrage to me directly, and I declare to you that if you do not at once release me that outrage shall be amply avenged!"

"Again I ask you—how?"

"You are committing an offence against the laws of England."

"Granted. Such offences are committed every day—every hour—and yet the offenders manage to evade unpleasant consequences."

"That is because their victims are too weak to bring them to justice."

"And you think you would not be equally weak?"

She drew herself up to all her stately height, and gave him a look that spoke her answer more eloquently than words. Whatever her faults might be, weakness did not count amongst them, and this he recognized.

"No," he said, "you are not weak, but all the same, you would not succeed any more than the others. You see, the law is a very delicate, although occasionally, a very crushing concern. It wants tender manipulation, careful management, and, above all, it wants proof. Now, what proofs have you against me?"

She was silent for a moment, in sheer amazement at his audacity, and he went on—

"How could you satisfy the world, much more a court of justice, that you did not come here of your own free will, and that it was only when your reputation was irretrievably damaged that you made a violent effort to redeem it by some romantic story of an abduction?"

"Mr. Vansittart, are you a fiend in human guise?" burst from her lips, and he smiled as if he found the observation rather pleasing than otherwise.

"I am a man—no more, no less. I prove it by my devotion to you, Mephistopheles; you will remember, was insensible even to the charms of Helen of Troy, that beauty whose loveliness was,

'Fairer than the evening air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars.'

I, on the contrary, am ready to yield myself, my fortune, my whole life to you, if you will only smile upon me ever so coldly."

He came a little nearer, but she retreated with a cry of horror, and a movement of repulsion that amounted to absolute loathing.

"Do not dare to speak to me in such terms!" she panted. "I hate you—I detest you! Even if I were free, and you were, I should still prefer death to words of love from such polluted lips as yours!"

He flashed a deep, dark red. There was no mistaking the sincerity of her tone, but it roused in him a certain fierce resentment that was in its way as powerful as passion itself.

His first idea, when he found out the error into which his accomplice had fallen, was, as we know, anger, but now a revolution had taken place within him, and a hundred different thoughts flashed through his quick brain in rapid succession.

He had the greater part of his wife's fortune, and the only motive that made him wish to get her into his power was the fear of what she might reveal with regard to Fulke Marchant's death.

Why not leave England altogether, taking with him the money and Rosalind? Then he could defy consequences, and, at the same time, inflict a bitter and lasting dishonour on the man whom he hated—Sir Kenneth Hawtreys.

CHAPTER XXX.

NONA MAKES A FRIEND.

As Nona fell forward, a light, girlish figure ran out of the hall, and Edith Charlton found herself called upon to play the—to her, congenial—part of good Samaritan.

Naturally, she did not recognise Nona, for it must be remembered that she had never seen her face, and she was too much taken up with the invalid to spare a glance for Andrea.

"Bring the poor creature inside," she said, hastily, to the man servant, who hastened to obey; and Nona was thereupon carried into the grand old hall, where a huge fire of pine logs was burning, and the draughts were kept out by big Japanese screens, embroidered in gold.

Nona was laid on a couch, and, while the servant went to fetch some brandy, Edith busied herself with tender assiduity in endeavouring to bring back suspended animation.

As she pulled off the veil, and poor Nona's face, white and rigid, as if carved in marble, was exposed to view, the young girl murmured a little cry of inarticulate admiration at the death-like loveliness, and at the same moment raised her eyes to Andrea, who was watching her.

Then she recognised him, and her gaze went back to Nona. An idea flashed across her mind, under the influence of which she involuntarily recoiled a step.

"Who is this lady?" she asked, almost below her breath.

Andrea hesitated, but did not reply, and just then the man returned with a wine-glassful of brandy, which the young girl, putting aside all considerations but those of humanity, proceeded to administer.

After awhile her efforts were successful, and a long sigh quivered through the blind woman's frame. She opened her eyes, and put out her hand with a curious, groping movement.

"What is it? Where am I?" she asked, swiftly, and Edith took upon herself to reply.

"You had fainted, and I had you brought in here."

"Who speaks?" demanded Nona. "Surely I have heard that voice before. Where is Andrea?"

"Here. Cannot you see him?" Edith returned, in some surprise, for Andrea stood immediately in Nona's line of vision.

"I cannot see, I am blind," answered Nona, with unintentional pathos, and Edith was immediately conscious of a strange revulsion of feeling.

Until this moment her voice and manner had been alike cold, for the recognition of Andrea had suggested to her the identity of his companion; and though her kindness would not permit her to desert a suffering woman, she had, nevertheless, determined Nona should not remain under the Manor roof one moment after she was convalescent. With the discovery of her affliction came a flood of tender, womanly pity.

"Oh, I am sorry, so very, very sorry for you!" she cried, involuntarily.

Nona turned in the direction of the voice, and held out her hand.

"Thank you!" she said, sweetly. Then forgetfulness of herself came, and the thought of her mission returned. "Ah!" she exclaimed, with a bitter cry of pain, as she half raised herself on her elbow. "I remember all now. I was too late, and Claud is committed for trial!"

Edith's face became rigid. She put up her hands to hide her tears. The morning had been to her one of the most painful excitement, for she herself had had to bear witness against the man she loved, and her testimony had carried with it, to those who heard it, a terrible conviction of Claud's guilt.

Even her father, who had at first refused to believe that Claud had fired the fatal shot,

found himself shaken by his daughter's evidence of Captain Marchant's dying words.

Edith herself was the only person who publicly declared her belief in the accused man's innocence, and with her it was a matter of faith.

"Can I not see Squire Charlton?" went on Nona, in a piercing voice. "He is the magistrate before whom Claud was brought, and it ought to be his mission to see that justice is done."

"It is his mission, and it is a mission that he fulfils," Edith returned, a little proudly. "No one who knows my father would doubt either his honour or his generosity."

"Then take me to him, and I will throw myself on his generosity! Tell him I am helpless, friendless, and that no woman ever called on a fellow-creature for aid with more need of it than myself?"

Edith turned with the intention of obeying the impetuous command. She took Nona's hand, and led her to the Squire's study, but at the door she paused.

"What is your name?"

"Nona Vansittart," returned the blind woman, firmly, and that old heart sickness came back to Edith, for here was another confirmation of the story of Claud's falseness, which Marchant had told her.

The Squire was surprised when his daughter ushered in the visitor, but his chivalrous pity was at once aroused by the latter's loveliness and affliction, and he carefully led her to a seat, and entreated her to let him know in what way he could be of service to her.

Edith retreated, and as the door closed behind her, Nona bent forward in the direction from whence the Squire's voice proceeded.

"Sir," she said, earnestly, "I think no woman ever approached you with such a story as mine, and, certainly, I never thought that Fate would compel me to repeat my miserable history to a comparative stranger. But I am, as I told your daughter, absolutely without friends, and what I would not do for myself I am impelled to do for another. The man for whom I wish to plead—the man whom it is my mission to prove innocent—is Claud Trevelyan, known to you under the name of Claud Stuart."

The Squire's features stiffened, and a certain look of obstinacy came in his face.

"Madam," he said, "it is my desire to help you if I can, but let me warn you that if you have any intention of enlisting, or trying to enlist, my sympathies on behalf of that wretched young man, you may as well spare yourself the pains, for my conviction of his guilt will be difficult to shake. However much I may incline to mercy, I cannot act in opposition to my conscience."

"Mercy!" repeated Nona, with passionate scorn, "I do not want mercy, but justice!"

"And that," added the Squire, still more coldly, "you may rest assured the prisoner will have. I fear, madam, your intercession will hardly avail much in his favour."

Nona lifted her head attentively. She could not see the darkening of the Squire's brows, but her delicate ear distinguished the subtle change in his voice, and she knew that her companion had hardened against her since he had learned the object of her errand. Was he already so much prejudiced against Claud that he would turn a deaf ear to her story?

"Why should my intercession tend to harm him?" she asked quietly, and leaning forward a little so as to be nearer the speaker when he answered.

The Squire looked rather uneasy, and shifted nervously in his chair.

"You have asked me an awkward question, madam."

"I am sorry, but I must demand an answer all the same."

"Well, then, if you will have it, your relations with the man who is accused of murdering Captain Marchant would seriously militate against whatever you might have to say on his behalf."

"My relations with him!" Nona repeated,

in a tone of surprise so genuine that the Squire was completely taken aback. "I do not understand. He was my husband's cousin, and my dearest, truest friend. Is there anything in this that weighs against him?"

The Squire was silent. Directly she mentioned Claud Stuart's name he thought of the story Captain Marchant had hinted, and came to the conclusion that this was the woman who had deserted her husband for love of the handsome young artist. But there was that in Nona's face—a lofty purity, and delicate refinement—which somehow made him ashamed of the suspicion. Surely no woman who had sinned could look so innocent!

"You do not reply," went on Nona, after a pause, during which she had still been leaning forward in an attitude of watchful attention. "Your voice was so kind when you spoke to me first that I am inclined to think you must be under some misapprehension, which will clear away when you have heard the truth. Will you listen to my story, sir, and reserve your judgment?"

He assented, and she then related all that had transpired, so far as Claud was concerned, since her marriage. Nothing but direct necessity would have induced her to take Squire Charlton into her confidence; but, as it happened, chance had befriended her, for the Squire was staunch and true as steel, and she could not have selected a better confidant had she searched the world over.

He did not interrupt her by a question or a word until she had finished. Indeed, astonishment held him silent; and, besides this, he was mentally comparing her tale with Falke Marchant's, and he decided that hers bore the stamp of truth, which his had lacked.

When she concluded, he bent forward and took her hands, his honest blue eyes filling with tears of sympathy as he gazed into her brilliant, but sightless orbs.

"My dear lady, I am truly sorry for your misfortunes, and I am more than glad that you have seen fit to repose this confidence in me. Believe me, it is not misplaced. As to Claud Trevelyan's guilt—well, it is impossible to pronounce an opinion, for the evidence is strongly against him, and, you see, we have the murdered man's own words. However, the shot may have been fired in self-defence or by accident; and in either case, it is a very different matter to deliberate, cold-blooded murder. We must see what can be done for the young man."

"I have been thinking that the best plan would be for me to have a personal interview with Claud, and hear what he has to say," interposed Nona. "After that I shall know better what to do—he will be able to advise me. I suppose there will be no difficulty in my seeing him?"

"None whatever."

"You, as a magistrate, will be able to give me permission?"

"Certainly."

"And," she continued, "I should be glad if I could take lodgings somewhere in the village. Do you think such a plan is feasible?"

"Quite feasible. I have no doubt there are half-a-dozen respectable families in Crowthorne who would be glad to give you accommodation."

Nona nodded her head, and remained silent for a while, gently smoothing one delicate ungloved hand over the other. When she spoke again there was a slight tremor in her voice.

"It is possible—nay, probable—that my husband may discover my whereabouts. In that case, may I appeal to you for protection?"

It was the Squire's turn to be silent now. He fidgeted restlessly about in his chair, and pushed the thick, grey hair from his brow—a trick of his when puzzled.

Nona guessed something of the current of his ideas, and her face crimsoned with shame.

(To be continued.)

LOOK AHEAD.

—o—

YOUTH of bright eyes and smooth white brow,
So happy and exultant now,
Viewing the brilliant sky above,
Thy bosom full of faith and love—
Love on, hope on, but still reflect,
The staunchest ship is sometimes wrecked.
Clouds will obscure the brightest sky,
Fancies most prized take wing and fly—
Weep not the past, for that is dead—
And for the future have no dread,
But look ahead!

Man of mature years, full of care,
With threads of silver in thy hair,
Fretting thyself o'er chances lost,
Thy life-bark sadly tempest-tossed—
Deem not that you have lived in vain,
The chances lost may come again.
Up! up! and work! be not cast down—
The sombre clouds that on thee frown
May, ere another day has fled,
Disperse, and sunshine banish dread—
So look ahead!

Decrepit pilgrim, nearly home,
Fear not the change that soon must come—
All living walk toward the grave—
God only asks the life He gave.
Let thy thoughts dwell on things above
And rest content, for "God is Love!"
Then youth, strong man, or pilgrim grey,
Remember, while ye toil to-day,
The earth at last must be thy bed,
Strive not for dross—'tis best instead
To look ahead.

F. S. S.

THE VOICE OF THE TEMPTER.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"Gone, without leaving any reason for his going?" exclaimed Lillian Wyndham, as soon as she had contrived to get Brenda by herself. "I'm afraid it's all too true!"

"One minute Miss Allingham said he was to join them at Brussels, and the next, that his things were to be sent to The Towers, not to his chambers in London. So, perhaps, he is coming here," said Brenda, determined not to forget that ray of hope.

"Oh, Brenda! worse and worse!" cried Lillian, clasping her hands together. "Don't you see that if anything happened, he didn't want all his things to go to his chambers with no one to look after them?"

"It must be stopped—it shall be stopped," cried the poor girl, almost frantic with fear. "Oh, Lillian! you are afraid of nothing; can't you go after them and stop them?"

"If I were there on the spot I should do no good," shaking her head, mournfully. "Mr. Desborough wouldn't heed me any more than Cyril Farquhar. He would abuse me for my pains, and I should offend Sir Eric for ever!"

"But you said you could prevent it!"

"Yes; if I only knew where they had gone. I am not certain, but I rather think a duel might be stopped by the police even in Belgium. They would be sure to start from Queenborough or Dover, as they must go either to Ostend or Flushing. I might risk a telegram to the chief of police at Ostend, Flushing, and Brussels, but I'm afraid it can do no good."

"Oh, do, do!" exclaimed Brenda, eagerly, willing to catch at a straw. "George shall take it to the post. We will get Lady Manville to send him."

"Don't you give your own orders?" she asked, in surprise.

"I always did, but Eric altered all that," her fair face flushing.

"I wouldn't stand any nonsense from him, if I were you. Perhaps you think it odd of

me to say so, but lately I've found out that the more you give in the worse he will get. There is a vein of tyranny in his disposition which I don't mean to encourage."

Having found some telegram forms, she sat down at an ornamental table and wrote a few lines rapidly on each, and then gave them to Brenda, who hurried out of the room with them.

At the same moment the gong sounded for the eight o'clock dinner, and Mrs. Wyndham realised, with a pang of disappointment, that the telegrams were too late for that night.

Now that all the rest of the guests were gone the silence of the house oppressed her terribly. She was used to a constant crowd of frivolous admirers, and she did not admire her present situation at all, with only two women to keep her company at meals, and one lover laid up in a sick room.

She had imagined that if she made up her mind to accept Sir Eric she would lay the foundations of a brilliant future; but now that she knew him more intimately, when the first ardour of his courtship had worn off, she began to fear that life with him by her side would mean a pathway strewn with thorns instead of roses.

It was quite a different thing for him to yield to her wishes without questioning whether they were right or wrong, to being governed by his own wild desires, and not caring if he trampled on all the world in order to satisfy them.

When she first knew him he was always cheerful, and generally the gayest of the gay, the leader of every foolish frolic, the instigator of every mad escapade.

But now he was so changed that he frowned much more often than he laughed, and when he ought to have been brightest and happiest was plunged in a gloomy reverie.

Harassed by the most gnawing anxiety, Mrs. Wyndham felt tried beyond endurance by Sir Eric's captious remarks during the long, wet day that followed.

She had told him that she had been sending telegrams off right and left about a Parisian bonnet which was long on its road, and she wanted to know if a groom might be sent to the station to ask for her parcel after dinner.

Sir Eric graciously assented, with the remark that she was pretty enough to do without foreign fashions.

Why didn't she use her beauty as an advertisement for English wares? She ought to be paid by the shops for setting them off.

She gave him her sweetest smile in answer, and then turning to Brenda, who had come to hear what orders there were about the groom, she said, with affected carelessness,—

"Tell him not to come home without the latest edition of the *Globe* or some other evening paper."

This was the real reason why the groom was to be sent to the station, and Brenda could scarcely touch a morsel of dinner for thinking of it.

Every time there was a step in the hall she shook like a leaf, and it was with difficulty that she entered at all into the conversation.

Mrs. Wyndham being more accustomed to masking her private feelings, and, perhaps, not feeling so acutely as the poor girl opposite to her, talked fashionable gossip in a way that delighted Lady Manville and astonished her other auditor. When the long dinner was at last over, she said to Brenda in a low voice,—

"When the paper comes, send for me, under any pretext whatever, the moment it's brought in."

Unable to sit still, Brenda went out on to the terrace, and walked under the shade of the colonnade. It was a dismal, wet evening; the deer were huddled together under the trees, the rabbits had retired to their burrows, and the geraniums in the garden looked battered out of shape.

Pacing restlessly up and down, her thoughts flew like a flock of birds, first in one direction then in another. She thought of her mother, leading a gay life at Vienna, in the highest

circles of society, surrounded by a tribe of children, who made her forget her first-born. Surely, she would be sorry if she knew how little happiness was left to her eldest daughter. It might be through no lack of kindness that she kept her in England, in the house which had been her home for so many years.

She might fancy that it would be more comfortable for her amongst her old friends, than to be transplanted into a foreign land where all would be strange to her.

Brenda tried hard to plead her mother's cause against her own convictions, for she wanted desperately to cling to the thought that somewhere, far away, somebody was thinking of her with tenderness, and caring for her welfare.

Surely a mother could never forget her child, and Lady Sophia might be longing to see her, and yet kept back by causes or necessities unknown to other people!

Now that Cyril was engaged to Miss Allingham, and Sir Eric to Mrs. Wyndham, she began to feel so alone that she ardently wished to find a home and a welcome in Vienna, though she shrank shyly from the idea of a household of strangers.

She could not stay on at The Towers after the marriage had taken place, and she really began to think it would be rather dull work to set up house with Miss Moreland when Cyril was unable to drop in.

Her natural home would be with her mother, and she supposed she would go there. Meanwhile, she must brush up her French and German, so as not to be tongue-tied when introduced to some fascinating foreigner.

Thus she tried to busy herself with all sorts of thoughts in order to divert her mind from the harrowing anxiety of the present. But the horrible dread was always there, hanging over her with black wings, like a vulture over the dying hunter on the African wilds.

Even now, as she stood there under the walls of his old home, Cyril Farquhar might be dead!

She shivered, and as the rain and wind increased, went indoors with a hopeless feeling of dejection, rather increased by the deplorable weather.

Would the groom never come back, and the evening never be ended? Slowly she undid the fastenings of her cloak, loath to go and face Lady Manville's empty chatter, and yet sick to death of her own company.

The lights in the hall looked cheerful after the dull, grey twilight outside, and she was just walking slowly towards the drawing-room, when she suddenly stopped short, as a piercing scream rang out in the stillness.

Her blood turned cold in her veins, her heart stood still! A moment later, as she was staring in the direction of the study, the door burst open, and out rushed Lillian Wyndham, evidently struggling against a paroxysm of terror.

Her face was quite bloodless, her eyes looked as if about to start out of her head, her pale lips quivered with fright. As she caught sight of Brenda, she rushed towards her, screaming out,—

"He's mad!—he's mad! I shall go out of my senses if I stay with him!"

"Hush! hush!" said Brenda, soothingly. "Don't let the servants hear. What has he done?"

"He says his grandfather's there in the room with him," gasping, and looking over her shoulder. "He actually spoke to him, and told him not to haunt him to death. Oh! I can't stay with him. It—it'll send me out of my mind!"

"You go into the drawing-room. There's Lady Manville come out to know what's the matter. Just tell her it's nothing—and—and—don't be so frightened," looking down kindly into her terrified face.

"But, Brenda," clinging to her arm, "what is it? Why does he see him?" in an awe-struck whisper.

"He doesn't see him, of course not. Our dear grandfather died quietly in his bed—"

there was nothing horrible about it. But have you left him alone?"

"Yes; I couldn't stay. Oh, I can never go to that room again!" shuddering.

"Don't talk like that—just go and forget it. There's coffee going into the drawing-room. Markham, has George come home from the station?"

"Yes, miss," stopping with the silver coffee-pot in his hand. "There was no parcel, and the newspaper office was closed."

"We can't hear anything to-night, so I shall go to bed, my nerves are quite shattered. Good-night, dear," lifting up her face to be kissed. "Oh! why did I ever come to The Towers?"

"Because you fancied Eric was a different man to what he is. I must go to him at once. And perhaps you will tell Lady Manville that he is not well, and explain as much as you like," she added, in order that all should not be left on her shoulders.

"Don't go, my dear! Send Whistler—anybody. I wouldn't go for a thousand pounds!" trembling all over at the thought of what she had been through.

"It would be cruel to leave him," and without giving herself any further time for thought Brenda went towards the study, and with a quivering heart opened the door, whilst Mrs. Wyndham looked after her with genuine admiration.

"Pon my word, she's a splendid creature, and I'll do her a good turn whenever I can," she decided, as she went very unwillingly to explain matters to Lady Manville, who had retired in rather a huff.

On her way she hastily turned over her plans, having resolved that nothing on earth should keep her any longer at The Towers. Whatever it cost her she must leave, or she felt her brain would reel. As it was, she was nervous and out of sorts, and felt as if the slightest thing would upset her.

Old houses were lovely to look at and pleasant to talk about, especially when you were in the company of parvenus; but there were all sorts of odd noises in the long corridors of The Towers, and it was time to decamp when the master of the house saw ghosts.

Mrs. Wyndham had no lofty notions about self-denial, and no wish to sacrifice herself for anybody in the world; and she began to think it would be pleasant for number one if she renounced her ambition to be Lady Farquhar.

There were other chestnuts in the fire besides this one, which would certainly burn her fingers, and the sooner she saw about felling out another the better it would be for her future peace.

With this practical resolution hovering in her mind she went into the drawing-room to please Brenda, took a cup of coffee to re-establish her nerves, and explained as little as she could to the expectant Lady Manville.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A SOUND something like a smothered groan met Brenda's ears as she went quietly into the study and closed the door behind her. She was a brave girl, but her heart beat like ten thousand hammers in her ears, and she looked towards the sofa expecting she knew not what. There Eric was lying face downwards, with his hands pressed to his bandaged forehead—either breathing hard or groaning, she could scarcely tell which. She went up to him timidly, and touched him on the shoulder. He started convulsively.

"Eric what is the matter, tell me? You'll make yourself ill," she said, softly.

As he heard the low, sweet voice which he knew so well, he raised his head with a deep sigh.

"Oh, Bren, you good girl! Thank Heaven, you've come! Have you heard?"

"Yes, she told me; but it was all fancy! There's the picture, just as usual; of course it hasn't stirred."

"Hush! don't talk of it," with a shudder that shook his powerful frame from head to foot. "Sit by me, and talk to me." She ran away from me—curse her selfishness!" with a heavy frown, as he raised himself up into a sitting posture.

"Take care, you'll hurt your leg. You ought to put it up."

"It will be all right there," catching hold of a chair to rest it on. "Now, come."

"I—I think I'll ring and send you Whistler. It is quite time for you to be going to bed," the colour rushing into her cheeks.

"I'm not going to bed for hours. Come, Bren, don't be unkind," he said, imploringly.

Her kind heart was touched by his white face, and his evident weakness, but the thought of his infamous conduct; and though she would not desert him, she could not be as she used to be before he sinned so heavily against every canon of a gentleman's honour. Very unwillingly she took a chair and brought it close to the sofa. That was as much as she could do, and she would not yield any further. It did not satisfy him, but he saw that if he did not submit he would frighten her away, and at present he was not strong enough to follow. He leant back wearily against the cushions at the head, and fixed his eyes on the pure, sweet beauty of her face.

"Lillian's a hard-hearted, selfish wretch," he said, gloomily. "She doesn't care for me a straw. I tell you what would suit her! To marry me and get me to slip the boots in a week, then she would be Lady Farquhar without encumbrances."

"If you didn't love her, why did you propose?" trying to shift her chair so as to be out of his range of vision.

"But I did. I worshipped her. I was an utter fool and went the whole hog. You see, wherever I met her she carried off the cake. It wasn't till I came home and saw you that I thought there could be a woman to compare to her. Pon my word I mean it!"

"Your worship is not worth much if it goes off so fast. She was frightened, poor thing. You shouldn't judge her so harshly," passing by the compliment to herself as if it were beneath her notice.

"And what was I? Don't you remember telling me that a woman wasn't worth the name if she didn't stick by a man when he was in trouble? She's not a woman! She has no more heart than a coltish! Oh, Brenda, what will become of me?" in an accent of despair.

"What do you mean? Your leg is getting on all right," not knowing what he alluded to.

"My leg! I wasn't thinking of that," in bitter scorn. "I'd be a cripple for life, and a pauper as well, to get rid of—of this other thing," his voice faltering, his brows drawn together as if with pain.

"But, Eric, it is only fancy," speaking very gravely. "Why should dear old grandpapa come to you more than to any of us?"

"Why?—why?—" trembling with excitement or fear, she could scarcely tell which.

"How can I tell? He does come, that's all I know. Oh, I can't be left alone. He'll come straight down from that infernal picture. He will!" starting up, whilst his eyes looked wild and terror-struck. "He is coming! Oh, curse you, curse you!" staggering to his feet, and holding on to the back of a chair, the perspiration standing in large beads on his forehead, his tall figure shaking like a frightened child's as he glanced at the portrait, as if compelled to look at it against his will.

"Eric! Eric! sit down! You'll make yourself fearfully ill!" she entreated, standing up by him and laying her hand on his arm. "There's nothing there!"

"Yes, she's coming!" in a thrilling whisper; "but I'll stop him. He won't come far!"

As he spoke he stretched out his arm, and before she could guess what he was about to

do, he seized hold of a heavy brass candlestick of antique workmanship, and flung it with tremendous force at the centre of the canvas.

He watched the large hole spreading in cracks over the painted figure with an expression that made the blood curdle in Brenda's veins. It was as if he had just dealt a murderous stroke, and were triumphing over a helpless corpse!

"What have you done?" she cried in horror, as she looked up at the mangled picture, and he sank back exhausted on the sofa, with a half-startled look on his ghastly face. "You know how fond we are of it, and it's the only likeness of him in the house!"

Sir Eric answered nothing, but bent his head, and buried his face in his hands.

"May I ring and tell Whistler to get some steps and take it down?"

Sir Eric nodded assent. He would be thankful to get rid of the picture; and yet, by some secret fear which he would not have confided to a soul, he had been prevented from taking the initiative.

Whistler answered the bell, and a curious smile hovered round the corners of his mouth as he went off to fetch the steps.

When brought, the steps were not high enough to enable him to reach the wire by which the picture was suspended, and he had to go back for a ladder. Markham came with him, as he wished there to be no unnecessary gossip amongst the footmen about the removal of their late master's portrait.

In solemn silence it was handed down, and Brenda looked at it with sorrowful eyes.

Strange to say, the face was uninjured, and the large dark eyes seemed to fix a sinister glance on the degenerate grandson.

"What shall I do with it, sir?" asked Markham, as he dusted it carefully with his own pocket-handkerchief.

"Burn it! burn it!" said Sir Eric, hastily, without looking up. He seemed ashamed to meet the old servant's grave eyes.

Brenda shook her head vehemently, and said in a whisper,—

"Hide it!"

Markham bent his head as a sign that he understood, and quietly left the room.

"Good-night, Eric!" said Brenda, quietly, determined not to be left alone with him any longer. "I am sure it is time for you to go to bed. Whistler is here, so let him help you."

"Good-night!" he said, sullenly. "You are in an awful hurry to get off." (Still, he did not attempt to detain her, and his eyes remained glued to the ground.)

When she reached the door, she looked back at him sorrowfully, scarcely able to believe that that stooping figure, in the listless, desponding attitude, was really the Eric Farquhar whom she remembered as the bright, high-spirited boy—the favourite of his grandfather.

Everything was changed since then, and dispositions had altered, like everything else. All peace and settled happiness had left the house since Sir Peter's death; and it was rather hard to go on pretending to be happy when there was nothing to make you so.

Brenda could not get to sleep for a long time after she was in bed, for the all-engrossing anxiety on Cyril's account; but towards morning she fell into a heavy, dreamless sleep, from which Mary was loath to wake her. Consequently she was very late for breakfast, and Lady Manville, who could be very particular about trifles, looked at her with grave displeasure as she marched out of the room with an air of business and a bunch of keys.

Rather glad than not to get rid of her, Brenda dawdled over her breakfast, waiting for the post to come in.

To her surprise, Mrs. Wyndham suddenly walked into the room in a close-fitting light ulster, and a very knowing little brown hat, the colour of which contrasted well with her yellow hair.

"You look surprised!" she said, rather nervously. "But I've had a wretched night, and

I was obliged to decide all in a hurry to go off to-day."

"Going away!" exclaimed Brenda, opening her eyes to their widest extent. "What will Eric say?"

Lillian shrugged her shoulders.

"It is his own fault. He frightened me so terribly; if I stayed another day I shouldn't have a nerve left. For both our sakes it is better that I should go!"

"Not for his," struck by the widow's intense selfishness, and too frank to hide her disgust. "You could not have the heart to desert him now he is ill, when you are the only person he cares for in the world!"

"Are you sure of that?" looking straight into her earnest eyes. "I rather fancy he would soon fill up my place. You may perceive that I'm not of a jealous disposition, as I go away and leave you behind."

"I don't know what jealousy has to do with it," drawing up her neck after her queenly fashion when offended.

"Any looking-glass might tell you. But don't be angry with me, dear. If I stayed here I should wreck my health, and so Eric no good. I could not stop his paroxysm last night, and if I saw him in another I should die," shivering at the thought of it.

"Then why shouldn't it kill me?" Brenda felt obliged to ask.

"Because you are such a brave girl, and you are so accustomed to him. I shall some back feeling ever so much better. Is the post often as late as this?" looking at her watch impatiently.

"No; I don't think so," with a glance at the clock.

Just then one of the footmen came in with the newspapers and letters on a silver waiter. Brenda caught up the *Daily Telegraph*, and left her correspondence to be laid on the table.

Mrs. Wyndham drew close to her side as she unfolded the paper with shaky fingers. They found the foreign telegrams, and the eyes of both fell upon the heading: "Fatal duel between two Englishmen, names unknown!"

The few lines which followed were dated from Brussels, and ran thus:—

"It is reported that two English gentlemen fought a duel at—early this morning. One is said to be seriously wounded, and the other shot through the heart. Up till now their names have not been discovered, but the police are instituting inquiries."

"Brenda!" almost screamed Mrs. Wyndham. "Don't look like that. It mayn't be they. It may be utter strangers."

The poor girl dropped down on to a chair without a word, resting her arms on the table, her head bowed down on her arms.

"Now don't please, don't! It makes it seem quite true," in an agitated voice. "I daresay it's all false from beginning to end. I'll go straight there, and find out the truth. I can't rest till I know it. How Paul Desborough would laugh if he saw us now! It isn't true. I could stake my life it isn't true. My dear girl, don't take on so. You—you frighten me so," her lips quivering, whilst tears poured down her cheeks.

"The carriage is at the door, ma'am, and your luggage has gone down to the station."

The announcement came from Markham, who hesitated after a glance at his young mistress, and finally broke the usual decorum of his department by asking if anything was the matter.

"We hope not. There's been an accident which we thought might concern some friends," Mrs. Wyndham said, as calmly as she could. "But names are given."

The butler retired, and after the fashion of his kind put two and two together, and upset Mrs. Seddon's mind on the first opportunity, by telling her that he was certain sure that there was something up with Mr. Cyril.

"I must go, or I shall lose my train. Don't give up hope till you hear from me. Remember, I promise to let you know by telegram or letter the moment I know myself."

Brenda d her white face to give a parting kiss.

"You will let me know!" she said, brokenly. "Whatever it is, promise to tell me the truth."

"I promise it. Oh, my dear child, I—I—can't bear leaving you," with both arms round Brenda's neck. "My dearest love to Eric—tell him anything you like—that I was ill or called away."

"You won't see him?" even at that moment horrified to think of what he would say.

"How can I? I should lose my train. Good-bye," and she ran out of the room, as if afraid of further remonstrance.

"This is a queer start!" Markham decided, as he watched the brougham drive off from the door. "My lady's in a mighty hurry to go away. I wonder if she will be as eager to come back? Shouldn't wonder if the master shut the door in her face!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Sir Eric went into such a violent passion when he was told of Mrs. Wyndham's departure that Brenda was really afraid that she would do herself some harm. His language was so fearful that she left the room, feeling that she was in no way bound to listen to it.

Whistler bore the brunt of his master's indignation with his habitual indifference. He was a cold-blooded man, whose only object in life was to gather enough money together in order to live in comfort when he retired from service. He was an invaluable servant to any unprincipled master, for he never allowed his conscience to stand in the way of his obedience, and he was surprised at nothing. When told to lie, he lied unblushingly. If told to steal, he would have stolen, and considered his master the thief instead of himself.

Sir Eric knew his value, and paid him accordingly, so that it was easy for the valet to amass a small fortune without stinting himself in the least.

He had a pale face, with rather a large nose, and a small mouth. His eyes were bright and full of intelligence; his forehead was narrow and high; his expression cold and suspicious; his hair dark, and always as smooth as possible.

Dr. Whitehead finding his patient in a high state of fever ordered him to bed, but Sir Eric refused to obey.

He was told that he might injure his health for life if he did not take more care of himself; but he only flew into another passion and swore like a trooper of old.

When Brenda came to him, looking like a ghost, and showed him the paragraph in the *Daily Telegraph*, he pretended to laugh at the idea of its referring to Cyril and Mr. Desborough, but secretly told Whistler to telegraph to the former's chambers in London.

The answer was that Mr. Farquhar had looked in on his way through London, but had not been heard of since.

Brenda watched the post in a fever of anxiety, but no letter came from Mrs. Wyndham. Once, when she was passing the study, Whistler came out with a trayful of letters in his hand. He gave an almost imperceptible start on seeing her, but quickly recovered his presence of mind.

"Sir Eric was in such a fuss to see his letters," he said, apologetically, "that I took the whole lot into him without waiting to count them."

"I do not wish my letters to go to anyone but myself," she said, sharply. "See that it doesn't occur again!"

The valet promised that it never should, but went his way with a sly smile upon his lips.

Driven nearly wild with a feverish longing for news which never came, Brenda wrote to Maud Allingham at the principal hotel at

Brussels, to beg her to tell her if she had heard anything of her cousin.

No answer came, and driven to her last resource, she appealed to Sir Eric to take some means of finding out the truth.

He surprised her by sympathising with her entirely, and declaring that he could stand it no longer himself.

"This uncertainty is wearing me to death," he said, wearily. "I tell you what I'll do. I'll send Whistler to find out the truth on the spot."

"Oh! that will be better than anything," her sad eyes lighting up with fervent gratitude. "But you are not well enough to do without him. You will miss him so dreadfully!"

"Never mind, I'll put up with James for a few days. Anything to relieve your mind, and my own as well."

"Why not, Markham?" she suggested, as James, the second footman, was a man whom she especially disliked, though no fault could be found with the way in which he performed his duties.

"He's so infernally fussy; he drives me mad. James will suit me much better. Whistler shall start at once."

"It is so very odd that Mrs. Wyndham—"

"Don't mention her name," he interrupted, hastily. "She's nothing but a low adventuress, with no heart and no character, and if she dares to come here I'll have the door slammed in her face!"

"How can you talk like that of a person you loved to distraction only the other day?" she said, with a sort of scornful wonder.

"There's a difference, an immense difference, between the fox you are hunting, and the fox when run to death. A whole county may be employed in the chase, but when the brute's caught he's thrown to the dogs," and he stroked his moustaches thoughtfully.

"I don't see what that has to do with it. When a woman has consented to be your wife she ought to be dearer to you than ever before?"

"There are women and women!" sententiously; "but good heavens!" he broke out, passionately, "what do you think I'm made of? Do you think that I can't see through her? She was marrying me for my money, and nothing else. Didn't she leave me in the most heartless manner at that confounded inn? Didn't she stay away from me when I was brought here till she was ashamed to do it any longer? Hasn't she flown to Desborough as soon as I was tied by the leg? I could take my oath she has, the veins on his forehead swelling as if they would burst. 'Don't attempt to defend her,' holding up his hand in warning. 'She's rotten to the core, and, by Heaven, my fingers itch to catch her by her white throat and strangle her. It would be some pleasure to see her wriggling like a dying worm at my feet!'"

"Eric! how can you?" cried Brenda, starting up. "It makes my blood cold to hear you. If Mrs. Wyndham has gone over to Brussels to find out the truth about this duel, I am intensely grateful to her. A widow can do many things that a girl can't."

"A good, pure innocent girl can almost make a saint out of a devil," he said, slowly, "but a bad woman does Satan's work for him on earth."

"And a bad man?" she asked, reproachfully. "Oh, Eric, how you have changed since you were a boy! You were so kind—so full of life and fun. I am sure you were happier then!"

"Don't preach!" he said, sullenly. "Ask my aunt to come to me; I want to speak to her."

Lady Manville put down her book directly the message was given to her.

"Poor boy!" she said, compassionately. "I daresay he wants cheering up. I am sure I shall be most happy to go to him."

She slipped out of the drawing-room in her trailing grey silk, for she had never given in to the fashion of short skirts, considering them as not adapted to the dignity of elderly ladies;



[FATAL NEWS FROM ABROAD.]

and Brenda looked after her with much admiration for her personal appearance, and wondered why she felt no more interest in her than in a chair or a table.

As the flowers in the vases looked dead she went into the garden to pick some fresh ones, and about half-an-hour later was immensely surprised to see Lady Manville coming out of the study with a flushed face, and an air of the greatest indignation.

"I never was so insulted in my life!" she gasped, drawn up to her full height. "Your cousin has actually sworn at me because I refused to do something of which my conscience disapproved!"

"Sworn at you—impossible! No gentleman could swear at a lady, especially one like you."

"No gentleman could," hurriedly walking into the drawing-room. "Of course, I told him that I couldn't stay another day."

"But you will?" coaxingly. "He shall apologise to you as humbly as possible. You would never leave me alone with him?"

"You won't be that. He says he knows of another person who will be quite ready to take my place. I shall write to my daughter, Lady Henderson, to-day, and tell her that I shall be with her by the end of the week, and, if you like to come with me, I am sure she will be delighted to see you," taking her place at the writing-table.

"Oh, don't be in such a hurry, please. I'll go to Eric and make him ashamed of himself," Brenda said, imploringly, as she leant on the back of Lady Manville's chair.

"My dear, if he knelt at my feet and asked my pardon it would make no difference," she said loftily. "After what he said to me I could not possibly remain under his roof. Take my advice and come with me!"

"I couldn't leave him utterly alone, and if I wanted to he wouldn't let me."

"No; I forgot that he was your guardian," frowning slightly in her perplexity. "That's

very awkward. Do you know he lost his temper so suddenly that I almost believe he meant to pick this quarrel with me. It is just as if he had some really diabolical plan in view that he knew I shouldn't countenance, so he wanted to get rid of me."

"No, no! He was always so pleased at having you. He said it gave such a tone to the house. But I tell you what," her anxious face brightening. "I'll write to my mother, and tell her the exact state of the case, and then, perhaps, she will insist upon my coming to Vienna."

"Ah, do, my dear," with a sigh of relief. "Lady Sophia is the proper person to appeal to. I promised Cyril Farquhar that I would look after you, but that Mr. Desborough seems to be safely out of the way, and if he should come back remember that my address will be Singleton Hall, near Derby, and come to me at once."

"He won't come," shaking her head sadly, as she thought of the probable reason. "I think The Towers will soon be like some haunted house in a book, deserted by everyone."

"Not very likely," said Lady Manville, taking up her pen, "when all the match-making mothers of the neighbourhood know that Sir Eric Farquhar is the best match in the county."

"I should be sorry to marry him," said Brenda, shrugging her shoulders. Then she remembered the flowers she had gathered, and carried off a vase to empty it before filling it afresh.

Lady Manville departed on the Saturday morning, and although she was always accustomed to consider self before everyone else, her heart smote her as she looked out at the solitary young figure on the platform. She knew how desperately lonely Brenda would feel without anyone to speak to except her guardian, and she put out her head to remind her of her address, and to beg her to come to

Singleton Hall, if she could possibly manage it.

Brenda gave her hand a grateful squeeze, and promised to join her if she could, feeling that a houseful of strangers would be infinitely preferable to a large mansion full of emptiness, and long, lonely corridors, with no one in them.

The train went off with the usual accompaniment of a scream from the engine, and a repeated clanging of doors, and Brenda turned away with the doleful sensation that she had parted from her last friend.

"Miss Farquhar, I believe?" said a well-modulated voice, and Brenda, looking round in surprise, saw a person who might possibly consider herself a lady, dressed in black shiny silk, with a black bonnet adorned with a green bunch of hops, and a long mantle, trimmed with mourning fringe, standing close beside her. "I am Mrs. de Ripington. Can you tell me if Sir Eric Farquhar has sent a carriage to meet me?"

There was something so alimy in the manner, and so untrustworthy in the pale face, with the long upper lip and the cold grey eyes, that Brenda involuntarily drew herself up with the air of a queen.

"Does Sir Eric expect you?"

"I suppose so, as it is by his request that I have come!" Mrs. de Ripington said quietly, but with a gleam of triumph in her eyes.

"Then I can take you in the brougham," said Brenda, coldly, with a feeling of utter repulsion towards the stranger which boded ill for the future.

(To be continued.)

WHAT sort of homes drunkenness makes! "Houses without windows; gardens without fences; fields without tillage; barns without roofs; children without clothing, principles, morals or manners."



[HIS PRESENCE ACTED AS A CHARM ON OUR MELANCHOLY.]

NOVELLETTE.]

AUNT HELEN.

—108—

CHAPTER I.

REHEARSED.

TEN years! How much has passed since then; and yet it seems but yesterday when, with Florrie's arm entwined in mine, we were roaming along the sandy beach, where the waves came tumbling and rolling at our feet, and we could hear their roaring in the distance, heaving and swelling far as the eye could reach, to where, in a bed of crimson and gold, the summer sun sank behind.

We seated ourselves then at the foot of one of those large sand cliffs which skirt the eastern coast, looking far away on that broad expanse of endless ocean, and wondering the while if we should ever in the future see it again from whence we saw it then, for on the morrow we—my sister and I—must turn our backs on those scenes which, from old associations, had become so dear to us.

There were only two of us, daughters of the Rev. John Norman, rector of Hasboro', and ever since we could remember we had never known another parent—a maiden aunt having acted as his housekeeper and our caretaker since the death of our mother, when we were but babies. And now, after seventeen years, he had gone to join the wife whose loss he never ceased to mourn; and not until we were compelled to quit its roof did we fully realise the beauty of the home which had been his and ours during those happy years of our childhood; when, with tears in our eyes, we thought how pretty it looked, nestling amid the big trees, which sheltered it from the bitter north-east wind, as it would come over the banks from the sea, which was but a few hundred yards from where it stood.

I was the eldest by a year, being just eighteen when this great trouble came to us; but, notwithstanding the slight difference in our ages, Florrie was ever looked upon as the baby; and, when dying, my father had commended his rosebud, as he called her, to my care, saying that if anything should happen to Aunt Helen, there was no other left to whom he could trust her; and so, girl as I was, I was deputed my sister's guardian—a fact which, I think, made Aunt Helen a little jealous, for, as she said, it was absurd in the extreme—I requiring as much supervision as she did; but then she could not deny, in spite of my youth, I was in my ways a woman; and she would often say, if the fact was commented upon by others, that Genevieve was born old, the while Florrie would remain a child if she lived to be forty.

We had been in the house all day, where Aunt Helen had been collecting and packing our goods and chattels, everything that had belonged to our father, according to his will, becoming ours, to remain in trust with his sister until we came of age, the interest of the five thousand pounds coming to each from his funded property, to be paid to her for our education during the intervening years.

There was a small legacy of a thousand pounds left to herself, a trifling sum to one or two old servants, and that was all; but everything in the house became our property, to dispose of or retain as we or Aunt Helen thought best and agreed to do.

So we had made up our minds, after selecting such volumes as we wished to keep, that the library should be sold, there being many ecclesiastical works, of which it mostly consisted, for which we had no taste, although valuable in themselves; and Florrie had watched them brought one by one from the shelves where they had rested so long until I could see how weary she was growing, the while Aunt Helen carefully opening each, seemed not to heed how wistfully the blue eyes

were fixed on the scene without, where the declining rays of the bright sun still rested on the soft, green grass.

"You looked so wearied, darling!" I said, putting down a volume of Bright's sermons, and advancing to where she was standing by the window. "Shall we go out for a little?"

"Oh! do, Veiva," she answered, and Aunt Helen for the moment removing her spectacles to tell us it was the best thing we could do, we soon left her to her occupation, which she seemed rather to enjoy than otherwise. And so we went out, Florrie's arm entwined in mine, sauntering along amid the beds where the flowers bloomed; along the path, where on each side the roses hung their pretty heads among the green of their leaves, until the murmur of the great ocean beyond seemed to call us to where the yellow sand was washed by its restless waves.

"I wish Aunt Helen would take a house somewhere in the neighbourhood, Veiva! I cannot bear to leave dear old Hasboro'."

"But we are going to a finishing school at Blackheath, dear; and having a home in London will be so much nicer for all. Besides, Florrie," I added, "you would not care to live all your life in this dull, out-of-the-way place! I know I shouldn't."

"I should never weary of the sea," she answered, "and I shall miss it so much—as much as little Dombey did. I am sure I shall," and stooping, she picked up a pebble—is had washed at her feet—and pressed it lovingly to her lips. "I will keep this as long as I live," she said. "It will always speak to me of home, and, no one knows, it might be all I should have one day to tell me of my happy childhood. Is it not a beauty? And if I have it polished—" but she stopped then, looking at the stone, the while she kissed it again, adding, "No, no, I will love you and keep you just as you are, wrapped round with this seaweed pink and grey, more

precious to me than the finest gold in which I could have you set."

"Throw it away, Florrie. What on earth do you want with such rubbish?" I said; but she pressed it only the closer, telling me there was no romance in my nature, no more than in Aunt Helen's, and she believed I was quite glad to leave the old haunts.

"It is the circumstances under which I do so, not the leaving Hasboro' which grieves me," I replied, when raising my eyes I saw the figure of a man advancing towards where we were seated.

Men were not very plentiful in Hasboro', for, with the exception of the farm-labourers, the farmers themselves, who were mostly old and married, and the miller's sons, there were none, save Ernest Hume, of whose parentage no one knew anything; notwithstanding which, and the fact that he was brought up by an old woman in the parish, his society was the only one our father allowed us to indulge in of the opposite sex.

He was but two years my senior, a fine, handsome lad, with limbs such as an Apollo might envy; and, of course, there were all sorts of stories current in the neighbourhood respecting the mystery of his birth, the old folks nodding their heads knowingly, and saying to each other that a blind body could see he was no poor man's child.

But the one which gained most belief was, that as an infant he had been sent in a hamper to the Rectory one Christmas morning, and the Rector, not knowing what to do with him—for he was not married then—sent him direct to the woman who had had the charge of him ever since.

Naturally, rumours less charitable in their construction were also spread abroad, and some went so far as to say they believed the Rector knew more about it than he cared to acknowledge, while others declared the boy to be his very image; but nothing could be gained by questioning Kirby and his wife with whom he was, for they knew nothing, receiving their pay, which was liberal, and doing their duty by him without prying into what they said was no business of theirs.

So Ernest progressed from petticoats to knickerbockers, from a ladies' school to a boys' public one, returning to Hasboro' at the age of sixteen to learn farming, and renew the friendship which, as children, had grown up between us.

My father had sent for him in his last illness, but when he came he was seized by the stroke which killed him, and the words he had vainly tried to utter had died with him.

"Are you really going to leave us to-morrow?" he said, when, after having shaken hands, he seated himself beneath the shelter of the cliff by Florrie's side.

"I am afraid so, Ernie," she answered, nestling close to him, and raising her eyes, half filled with tears to his, and all the while she was wrapping the pebble with the seaweed in a piece of paper she had taken from her pocket. "And I do believe Veiva is quite glad."

"And you are not?"

The words were spoken very low, so low that I could scarcely distinguish them; but I could see the colour spread over her face, reaching to where the yellow curls rested on her pure, white forehead, and I knew it was love for Ernie which made her so cling to the old home.

"I think I will go back to auntie," I said, for I saw they did not want me, Florrie having arisen with the intention of accompanying Ernie close to the water's edge, ostensibly to gather something more as a souvenir of the old haunts, though I knew it was really that they might converse, rid of my presence.

Aunt Helen was still in the midst of her books when I returned, but to my astonishment (for she was not a nervous woman) she started so when I made my appearance that she dropped the one she was holding, the while a paper which had been in many folds, and was closely written on, fell to the carpet.

"I am so sorry I frightened you, auntie," I said, and was in the act of stooping to recover the fallen book, when she picked it up with the other before I had time.

"It shows how necessary it was to examine each volume," she said, "before allowing them to go into the hands of strangers."

But when I asked her why?

"Oh! nothing, nothing," she replied, removing the apron which she had put over her dress, and placing the paper she had recovered in the bosom of the latter. "Where is Florrie?" she asked.

"I left her and Ernest on the beach; they will be here directly," and even as I spoke they were seen approaching in the distance.

"If we had been remaining here I should decidedly have put my veto on you and your sister being on such familiar terms with that young man."

"Aunt!"

"I said no more, for they were close to the window then, and I did not wish that Ernest should hear any discussion in which his name was mixed up; but I saw a puzzled expression pass over his face, as he could not fail to notice the coolness with which Aunt Helen received him."

We had tea afterwards, but he did not stay long, and when he rose to say good-night, it was Florrie who accompanied him to the door.

"I could not ask her to-night, my darling!" I heard him say, "for I feel sure she would not consent; and if she said 'No, Florrie,' and you went away, leaving me no promise, what hope would there be for me in the future?"

"If she said a hundred times, 'no!' Ernie, it would make no difference. I shall never love any one but you."

His arm was round her waist, and he was looking so sadly on the beautiful, passionate face upraised to his, the while he lifted tenderly the curls which clustered on the broad, white forehead, and then he kissed her, as a father might a child, little thinking, in the faith of his twenty summers, of all that would, in contact with the big world come 'twixt him and his girl-love.

They parted then, beneath the silent stars, Florrie standing watching until his form was lost in the dark green of the trees beyond, looking so sad as she leant by the porch over which the roses were trailing, and her yellow hair seeming like to gold on the black of her dress.

"You had better come in, dear!" I said.

"There is a heavy dew falling!"

"You here, Veiva? I thought you were with auntie! To-morrow, dear, I shan't be able to hear them, you know, to me, the sweetest music of all. They tell me so much—the waves—and when I am gone—"

She burst into tears then, and, unresistingly, I led her within, where Aunt Helen was making preparations for evening prayers.

"You are a very foolish child," she said, when she saw Florrie's tear-stained face; but the servants filing in made no further remark, and shortly after we were resting our heads on our pillows for the last time beneath the roof of the home of our childhood.

CHAPTER II.

LEAVING HOME.

The next morning, and what a lovely, glorious morning it was!—the sun shining so brightly, and the birds singing their sweetest notes, while, from the upper windows, we could see the light dawning on the blue of the distant waves, and a haze, like a veil of gauze, arise from the horizon!

We were up early, for there was much to do before we left the home, which was to be handed over to an agent until the new incumbent arrived, and we could not bear to stay to witness the dismantling of all we loved so dearly.

Old Tuzzle, our faithful dog and companion

through so many long years, seemed perfectly aware of all that was going on, keeping very close to our side the whole time, and looking up so pitifully with those soft, brown eyes of his, which said so plainly, "Don't leave me behind!"

But to take him with us into a strange London house was morally impossible, and when I saw Ernie coming across the lawn I determined to ask him to take care of him for Florrie's sake.

"But she would not see him then," she said, "she wanted him first to see Aunt Helen," and I knew what that meant, with a sad mingling at my heart as to the result; for, strange to say, she seemed suddenly to have taken quite a dislike to Ernest, who, until yesterday, had been quite a favourite. So I was not a bit surprised when he came from the interview to see how sad and dejected he looked.

We had arranged, Florrie and I, to await him in the arbour, just by the beech tree, where the branches swept the soft turf at its foot, and when he came I saw the tears start to her beautiful eyes; for she read in his face how it had ended.

"I never saw Miss Norman so enraged before," he told us, when we asked what Aunt Helen had said. "She asked me if I were mad, or supposed she was, to give her consent to her niece engaging herself—a mere child—before she had seen anything of the world, or was old enough to know her own mind; and then, the cruelest thing of all," she said was, "and to a man who had not even a name to offer her!"

"I am young, and will make one of which she shall never be ashamed," I urged; but she would give no promise further than if after four years we should both be of the same mind, we should receive no further refusal to our suit from her. So you see, darling, the cloud has its silver lining!"

But she could not look on the bright side, she told him, four years to her appearing almost interminable, and she felt sure when she left Hasboro' she was leaving all happiness behind her.

And I suppose we all three—the eldest but twenty—took the same gloomy view of the future, for I know we all cried together, Ernie manfully endeavouring to restrain his tears the while he tried to comfort us.

But what puzzled me most was the reason Aunt Helen had for taking such a sudden dislike to poor Ernie, and I wondered, in my youthful mind, whether the closely-written paper she had found amongst my father's books, and which she so carefully hid away, had anything to do with it; but she was as close as a sealed volume herself, and when we re-entered the house she merely kissed Florrie more affectionately than usual, told her she was a foolish child, and ought to be thinking more of dolls than sweethearts.

But she raised no objection to Ernie remaining with us to the last, so when the carriage arrived, which was to take us to the station, she told him to jump in and sit beside her.

It was nearly an hour's drive before we arrived at the terminus, and we had some time left the last glimpse of the sea-cliffs behind us before we neared our destination, and all the time Florrie's yellow head was pillowed on Ernie's shoulder.

Aunt Helen feigned to be asleep, and I looked out on the bright fields, where the golden corn waved, and the green hedges and fall-leaved trees, which seemed to pass us—not we them—as we went along.

Little in the way of conversation had passed between us, and then it had entirely ceased, only the lovers, like cooing doves, whispering to each other.

But as we neared the little town from which the train started, aunt setting the example, we all resumed a matter-of-fact appearance, Florrie adjusted her hat, and Ernie sat bolt upright and consulted his watch, saying we had plenty of time, it wanting yet twenty

minutes to the hour the train started, and then we dashed into the station-yard.

Of course, it was all bustle after that, Aunt Helen very anxiously superintending the transit of the luggage, giving no thought to us as we stood on the platform, the while she saw it duly weighed, labelled, and safely placed in the luggage-van; after which we followed her to the waiting-room, where she told us to remain whilst she procured the tickets.

All Ernie's offers of assistance she sternly refused, and so there was nothing for him to do further than stay by his beloved after he had bought at the bookstall such literature as he thought she would like, and at the refreshment bar the cakes and tarts he fancied she would enjoy.

"You will write to me, darling!" he said, "and send me your address, and keep this, Florrie. It will remind you of me; and—Has-boro', he blurted out, for his voice was shaking with the emotion he strove so hard to smother. And I felt the tears rising to my own eyes when I saw how much he grieved at the parting with his child-love—his little playmate.

She took his gift then, a pretty bracelet made of pebbles from the home beach, linked with silver; and, regardless of the other occupants of the room where we were, threw her arms round his neck weeping out her grief on his shoulder.

"I shall never believe you have forgotten me until you return me this, and Heaven grant that may be never!" he said.

And then Aunt Helen approached, telling them she was surprised, when the bell ringing, we had to hurry forward to take our seats in the departing train.

We had the good fortune to get a carriage to ourselves, auntie taking up her position at the far end and arranging her rugs and wraps to her satisfaction, the while Florrie was seated by the window near the platform, and Ernie stood holding her hand to the last.

But they had to say good-bye then, for the guard advanced to close all doors, and their lips met for the last time.

"Don't forget Tuzzele, poor old fellow!" was Florrie's final request, and then we were steaming out of the station to begin a new life in scenes so different to those we had left behind.

We gave no thought to where our new home would be, all that we loved and cared for passing from us now so rapidly that it became a matter of indifference whither we went.

For some time we had no fellow-travellers, and Aunt Helen made herself comfortable in her particular corner of the carriage, composing herself to sleep; the while we looked from the opposite window on the strange country through which we were passing, the harvestmen resting on their scythes to view us as we went flying by, leaving hedgerows and watercourses rapidly behind, with one or two small country stations, which whirled from sight in the same mad race.

The books Ernie had purchased for us we found it impossible to read from the oscillation of the train; even had we been inclined to do so—which we were not—our minds being too much occupied with the novelty of travelling and our hearts too full when we remembered the scenes of our happy childhood from which we were going, it might be, for ever.

It was then we discovered a lessening of speed, and a few minutes after we drew up at a small terminus, and we could scent the honeysuckle which grew over the door. Aunt Helen awoke with a start then.

"Where are we, children?" she asked.

But we were unable to answer, our carriage being so situate that we could not see; and notwithstanding that the guard had bawled out something several times, we were in entire ignorance as to what it was.

There were only three or four passengers on the platform, and they did not seem in any hurry to take their places, for they still remained conversing to each other with their wraps on their arms and the hot sun coming

down on their heads; the while others alighted from the train.

But a porter commencing to ring a bell they all made a move, hurrying then as if for dear life, and the guard had already commenced banging to the doors previous to the start, when we saw a gentleman quickly emerge from the sweet-scented porch where the honeysuckles grew, in his nervous haste (for we were just on the move) attempting to enter the carriages where the doors were already locked.

"This way, sir!" And before we could obey Aunt Helen's order to hold the door fast it was opened from the outside, and he had entered our compartment.

He was a tall, military-looking man, about twenty-seven years of age, with but very little whisker and a very heavy moustache entirely covering his upper lip; his hair was dark in total contrast to the other, which was of a tawny colour; and in his hazel eyes there lurked a glance of mischief which was irresistible, and I could see them dance with delight at the air of inquiry which Aunt Helen assumed when he joined our party.

"I must apologise, ladies," he said, looking round to the probability of finding a seat; our traps, shawls, and Auntie's canary having filled every available space. "But at the next station I will relieve you of my society," and I believe Aunt Helen, notwithstanding her assertion to the contrary, inwardly prayed that he would, the while we girls as thoroughly trusted he would not.

His presence acted as a charm on our melancholy, which dispersed beneath the bright tone in which he conversed; for, notwithstanding the reserved silence our esteemed relative would have retained to the journey's end, even she found herself unconsciously drawn from her reclusiveness, and when the train again drew up, she was the first to beg he would not think of changing carriages.

"A thousand thanks!" he said, addressing Auntie, the while the mischievous glance he threw at us did not escape our observation. "But I am sure you must need some refreshment. These young ladies look perfectly famished!" and, in spite of all remonstrances, after telling us we stopped here for twenty minutes to take in water, he was out of the carriage, and we could see him hurrying towards the counter presided over by Spiers and Pond's Hebes.

The small black-leather portmanteau, which on his entry he had placed in the rack, facing where Aunt Helen was sitting, seemed to possess an extraordinary attraction for her; she, the moment he had left the carriage, repeating the three white letters painted thereon as though committing them to memory, or anxious to discover the names they would initial.

"G. O. M.," she read, first to herself and then aloud. "I wonder what his name is? But that he is a gentleman no one need doubt for a moment. George—" and then feeling assured it was not Oliver, and unable to think of another name likely, suggested it might be some family one, when Florrie remarked perhaps Grand Old Man, but the reproof such a suggestion brought on her from Aunt Helen, who was a strict Tory, prevented her from guessing further, and a few minutes after a boy was seen approaching with a tray, on which were three covered dishes.

Of course, we knew who sent them, and at first I thought Auntie would have returned the soup they contained untasted—and, I am sure, had she known then from whose hands she was receiving the favour she would have done so; but the allotted time before the train started was growing too short to do anything further than endeavour to sup it, hot as it was, and we had just done so when the whistle sounded, the plates were hurriedly recovered, and our fellow-traveller bounded into the carriage.

There was plenty of room for him now, and the while, acknowledging his kindness, I could not fail to notice how deftly Aunt Helen en-

deavoured to elucidate the mystery of G. O. M., the while she became quite confidential respecting our movements.

"You go as far as London?" she questioned.

"Yes," he answered. "For a short time I shall be at Eaton-place with my mother, previous to my joining my regiment when it proceeds to India."

"You are in the army, then?"

"Yes," he answered. "After trying everything else but the church, I think, and failing in all, I at last gained the master's consent to my following the only profession on which my heart was fixed."

"Have you no father, then?"

"He died when I was a boy, shortly after his second marriage; and, being the only child, I regret awfully that I could not make up my mind to remain at home, become a respectable lawyer, doctor, or something of the kind, you know; but—ugh!" and he shuddered, "I never shall forget the three months I was in an office, allotted to one of the first solicitors in London. The very scratch, scratch of those pens set my teeth on edge; and the poor dev—, I beg your pardon—the poor wretches who came to receive but the shell of the oyster, when their expectations had been so high, made my heart ache; but the case that settled me was that of a poor widow, who had been lured on until she had expended her last shilling in the hope of recovering what from the first she had no title to!"

"And so you gave up law?" and Aunt Helen smiled.

"Yes; the fable of the spider and the fly was a study I could pursue no further. But we are drawing towards the big centre, I should think, to judge from the atmosphere."

Florrie and I looked out then on such an expanse of roofs over which we were passing, that we stared in wonderment to think how children could live and thrive amid the dirt and smoke which prevailed in every quarter.

"Is this London?" Florrie asked in surprise, to whom the metropolis had ever been in imagination the most wonderful place in the world.

"The worst side of it," he answered. "Wait, and the next time I have the pleasure of seeing you, you will be in raptures with its grandeur and beauty!"

We were steaming into the station then; the tickets had been collected, and a few minutes after we were on the platform, dazed and bewildered, amid the unusual noise and bustle which surrounded us.

"You must allow me to get you a cab. And your luggage, can I see it to for you?"

A few minutes after, and he was raising his hat, wishing us good-bye, and hoping we should not be disappointed in the Great City, the while he had placed his card in Aunt Helen's hand, trusting we should meet again; and she, with a strange expression on her hard countenance, was solving the riddle of "G. O. M."

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.

WHERE we were destined to we had not the least idea, further than Connaught-terrace, which Aunt Helen almost dislocated her neck in leaning out of the cab window whilst communicating to the cabman where it was she wanted to be driven to.

To us it might have been Jerusalem, and the innumerable length of streets we traversed before arriving at our journey's end; we began to think the distance could not have been further; and as we considered the many escapes which in our imagination we had had from collision with other vehicles during our transit, we were quite glad when at last our Jehu pulled up at the terrace indicated, although some moments elapsed before he could be brought to understand what number it was we wanted.

"Of course you are prepared to receive us,

Mrs. Melville?" Aunt Helen said, when, the door being opened by a neat little maidservant, a middle-aged lady came from the parlour to greet us.

"Yes, madam, I had your letter, and had the rooms you mentioned got ready for you, and I only hope you will be comfortable. Don't mind about the cabman, I will see to that," for Auntie had commenced an argument with that individual respecting the fare, which threatened to end unpleasantly had not Mrs. Melville come to the rescue, and insisted upon our entering the parlour until she had settled the dispute.

What a box of a room it did seem, too, notwithstanding that the folding doors which communicated with another at the back were thrown open; but, when Mrs. Melville's presence was felt, it was like a ray of sunshine entering in at a darkened chamber. What before had seemed so dull, so stuffy, appeared all at once to brighten, and I felt had I any great trouble it was to her I would look for the sympathy which I felt sure I should meet with.

That she was a lady, every action, every word, convinced one of the fact, notwithstanding that she acted her rôle as landlady as though she had been accustomed all her life to let apartments; but she never wearied you with stories of her former greatness. To her past history she never alluded, though none but the vulgar ever dreamt of levelling her with the ordinary lodging-house keeper.

"Tea is already prepared, Miss Norman," she said, when she returned, "though, doubtless, you and these young ladies would like to refresh yourselves with a wash first, after your long journey. Annie will show you your rooms," and ringing the bell the same little maidservant replied to the summons.

Naturally, to girls who had never been beyond the neighbourhood of the village in which they were born, the passing panorama of human life to be seen from the drawing-room windows was so novel and amusing that we wished for nothing after tea further than to sit there and watch the maddening crowd moving ever-on-on.

From the balcony we could see the green of the trees in the park beyond, the while the continual whirl of the vehicular traffic, far and near, sounded almost like the roar of the distant waves, now so far away. And later on, instead of keeping us awake, as Mrs. Melville feared it would, we were lulled to sleep by the sound, to dream of Hasboro', and fancy ourselves within sight of the billows washing the sand of our native shore.

"I suppose you girls must see some of the chief London sights before we think of school?" Aunt Helen said, after the second day we had been at Connaught-terrace; "and, really," she continued, "I have been considering the matter, and think, after all, at your age, it would be quite sufficient, being so far advanced, to engage someone to give you instruction in music, &c., or, in fact, there are classes you might attend."

Of course we fell in with these views, having from the onset deemed it as absurd, young women as we were, to be sent to school, and so ultimately the point was settled. We had now been two months in London—two months which had passed so quickly that it appeared but a few days since we had left the old home.

Florrie had written several times to Ernie, and he had replied, telling her of all that was passing in that quiet spot, and how he was working to make himself worthy of her at the expiration of the four years.

He sent her his photo, very badly executed by a provincial hand, but it was Ernie, and that was enough; and so Florrie purchased one of the prettiest frames she could select which she thought was worthy of it to place on her dressing-table.

Aunt Helen saw it there, but said nothing, thinking the less the opposition offered the sooner she would forget all about such nonsense; and so it remained unnoticed but by

Florrie herself, who would kiss it so fondly each night before retiring to rest, until—on one occasion when Mrs. Melville had entered the room respecting some alteration in the furniture—it had attracted her attention.

She was standing with the photo in her hand, intently gazing on the features there portrayed, when Florrie returned from the academy she attended.

"Is he not handsome, Mrs. Melville?"

The landlady started, her whole thoughts so riveted on the picture that she had not heard Florrie's footsteps until she spoke, thinking she was alone.

"My child, how you startled me!" she said. "It is a good face, though a bad photograph; but that is not why I was looking at it so closely."

"But you never saw him, Mrs. Melville, for he has never left home—the home where we were children together."

Mrs. Melville replaced the picture.

"I have never seen him, dear," she said; "but I once knew someone so like him that she might have passed for his sister. But what am I thinking of? That is twenty years and more ago, and this young gentleman is little over that now, I should think."

"That is just his age," Florrie laughed. "What a good guess you are! So the lady you knew might pass for his mother, I suppose?"

"Oh! she may be dead now, poor thing, after all these years."

"But why?" Florrie asked. "She would not be older than Aunt Helen, would she?"

"No, nor so old," Mrs. Melville answered.

"But she always seemed in trouble all the time she lodged here, and although we were very friendly she would not speak of her sorrow. She was more like an angel than a woman. But she left me suddenly—to take a situation, she said—and although I have tried to find her out I have not seen her since. That is wrong," Mrs. Melville said, correcting herself. "I met her once; it was at the book-binding office, one Christmas-eve, in Oxford-street. They were very busy, and I was pushing my way in to send a present to a friend I had in the country, when, knocking accidentally against a lady, I begged her pardon, and was in the act of moving forward, when—she turning round to say I need not apologise, it was unavoidable in such a crowd—to my astonishment who should it be but my late lodger, Mrs. Hume!"

"She had just placed a hamper on the counter, impressing on the man's mind to be careful with it, and then moved away. I should have liked to have asked her about herself and where she was living, for we had always been great friends; but she said she was so sorry she could not stay a moment, as they expected her home by six o'clock to dinner, and it only wanted ten minutes."

"And didn't you see her after?"

"No; I transacted my business, hurrying out in the hopes that I might see her again in the street, but she had disappeared, and I never saw her afterwards."

"Did you say her name was Hume?"

Florrie asked.

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Melville answered.

"Why, that is Ernie's name—his name!"

Mrs. Melville looked half bewildered.

"That is strange!" she said, again studying the face towards which Florrie was pointing. "I wonder if they can be any relation?"

"That is impossible, for poor Ernie has none. He has lived ever since he was a baby with Farmer Kirby and his wife."

"And who is Farmer Kirby?" Mrs. Melville asked.

"Some old people in our parish; but if you were to ask them anything about Ernie they only say, 'Heaven sent him,' and that is all. But everyone knows he is the son of gentle-people, and not theirs."

Florrie told Aunt Helen after of the conversation she and Mrs. Melville had had together, also of the strange coincidence of the name and likeness.

"I don't see anything strange in it," Auntie answered. "Do you suppose there are no two people alike in the world? And as for Hume, the name is as common as Brown or Jones; but I do not approve of these confidences. Too much familiarity breeds contempt. And, notwithstanding that Mrs. Melville is a very nice woman, there is no reason why you should enter into family matters with her; and for the future, remember, I shall expect you to be more reserved!"

"Mrs. Melville is a lady!" Florrie said, passionately.

"She may be," was the cool rejoinder. "Yeiva, just hand me that sheet of the *Tele-graph* where apartments are advertised."

"Oh, Auntie! you surely are not going to leave here, are you?" I asked, in dismay, for I knew Aunt Helen was as likely to pack up and move the next day if the fancy seized her as not; and I dreaded encountering the ordinary type of lodging-house servants and lodging-house mistresses usually to be met with.

"Certainly, if I hear any more of this nonsense," Aunt Helen answered.

After that a sudden silence fell over us, but Auntie did not study the advertised column of rooms, where every comfort one could desire was to be met with; and even Florrie, so fearful was she of a change, never remonstrated when she discovered that her beloved photo had been removed, contenting herself that night with crying herself to sleep, to dream of the original.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISSING BRACELET.

I FELT sure, however, in spite of Auntie's injunctions, that Florrie had confided to Mrs. Melville how matters stood, for that lady never referred to the subject of the photo after.

We had just entered November, the soft air of summer still lingering around, whilst the leaves hung yet on the branches red and brown, of which only a few had fallen to the ground.

We had seen different effigies sported along the streets in commemoration of Guy Faux, and had occupied seats at a window in the Strand to view the Lord Mayor's procession, and then the weather suddenly changed, and we had our first experience of a London fog.

We had been shopping, Florrie and I, Auntie's rheumatism preventing her from accompanying us, when suddenly it became so dark we could not perceive where we were. It was at the corner of Regent-street, turning round to Piccadilly, our intention having been to walk home by Park-lane.

"We may as well go on as turn back," Florrie said, who would not hear of our taking a cab. "Besides, it may clear in a few moments," which it did, enabling us to proceed as far as the park, when it came on thicker than before.

"It is useless to stand still," I urged; "and if you persist in walking, Florrie, let us get home as quickly as possible. Auntie will be so anxious."

"I am sure we must have passed the Lane," she answered; and so we had—a fact which made us both so nervous we could not move a step.

"I am afraid, ladies, you have lost yourselves, and as there is little or no chance of its clearing now, allow me to get you a cab."

We recognised the voice in an instant, although we were unable to see at the moment who it was who thus addressed us; but on our telling him how frightened we were,—

"Why, it is my little fellow traveller, is it not?" he asked. "I am sure I am not mistaken, for I shall never forget the pleasant journey we had to London. And how is Auntie?"

"She is quite well, Mr. —," and then I came to a standstill, for we had known him by no other name than the initials painted on his valise.

"Captain Montgomery," he said. "Have you so soon forgotten me as not even to remember my name?"

"We never heard it before."

"And I gave Miss Norman (you see, I ascertained yours," he laughed) "my mother's card, hoping every day she would have come to see how gladly she would be welcomed to Eaton place."

"I wonder she never told us," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Where are you living?" he asked. "But I must not keep you standing here in this abominable atmosphere; so jump into this cab, and allow me to escort you part of the way, at least."

But the fog had thickened so considerably that the traffic was stopped, and the cabman only shook his head in answer when hailed.

"Well, there is nothing for it but to walk," the Captain said, offering us each an arm. "I think you will trust me," he added. "Thereupon, I shall, in the first instance, take you to my mother's; it is so much nearer than—where did you say? Connaught-terrace?"

"Oh! really, Captain Montgomery, I don't know what Auntie will think. She will be so alarmed. Don't you think it is possible we can get home?"

He considered a moment, when, the red light of a post-office making itself visible near at hand, his resolution was formed.

"One moment," he said, stationing us at the door while he entered, to return almost immediately. "It is all right, she will be relieved of all anxiety in a few minutes."

"Have you telegraphed?" and as he answered in the affirmative, "I am so sorry, Captain Montgomery, to give you so much trouble," I added.

But he made no reply farther than to press the hand which rested on his coat-sleeve, and then we had evidently arrived at our destination.

It was quite a relief to enter the spacious entrance hall, the door being opened by a servant in plush breeches and white stockings, who looked awfully surprised to see his master accompanied by two ladies.

"My lady was getting very anxious, sir," he said, and then we heard the rustle of a silk dress overhead, and, looking up, an elderly lady was seen leaning over the balustrade.

"Is that you, Gerald?" she said. "My dear boy, I am so glad! I was growing quite anxious."

"Nought never comes to harm, mother," he laughed; "but I must crave your hospitality for two ladies whom I found wandering in the fog."

Asking us to ascend the stairs, he introduced us to her ladyship, who, on his telling her we were the same of whom he had spoken to her as his railway companions, extended to us a most cordial welcome.

"You must stay to dinner!" she said, for it having again cleared, I was anxious to reach Connaught-terrace.

"Gerald tells me he has telegraphed to your aunt, therefore there is no need to worry on her behalf."

"Oh! but, indeed, Lady Montgomery," I began, looking ruefully at our walking costume and complexions, which had not been improved by coming in contact with the blacks of the murky atmosphere through which we had passed.

"No apology for dress is needed," she answered, "and Harris, my maid, will supply you with all you require for your toilet; Gerald and myself, except on rare occasions, as usual, being all you will meet at the dinner-table."

On our return to the drawing-room we had more opportunity of studying the face of our hostess—a sweet, fair face, except for its sad expression, speaking little of the years which had passed, since the hair, now slightly faded, was of a bright, golden hue.

The broad forehead was still white and smooth, the lines around the mouth alone telling of the youth which had departed; but a

something familiar in the features it was which impressed us most, the while both Florrie and I puzzled our brains, without success, to bring to our minds where we had seen that face before.

"You come from the country, I think, Gerald told me?" her ladyship said, when, dinner over, we had returned to the drawing-room.

"Yes; we were born on the East coast, our father being Rector of Hasboro', and until we came to London we had never left our native place."

I saw her eyes travel to the deep mourning in which we were dressed, when with an anxiety in her voice she could ill conceal—touching the wide crape-bordering—

"This is not for him, is it?" she asked.

"It is, Lady Montgomery," I answered.

"My sister and I are orphans, our mother dying when we were too young to remember her; and now we have no one but Aunt Helen—poor papa's sister."

"And his name was?—my son did tell me!"

"Norman!" I said. "Did you know him?"

I don't know what induced me to ask this question, but she seemed as if she knew it well, the while she feigned ignorance.

"Some years ago I knew a clergyman of that name; but it might not have been the same," she returned, dreamily, and then her son entered the room.

I gazed up at the little gilt timepiece, thinking how angry Auntie would be if we stayed late.

Florrie was looking at some views her ladyship was showing her of Baden-Baden, and I begged of Gerald that he would send for a cab for us, as it was nearly nine o'clock.

"There is plenty of time," he answered, leading me to a recess by the window, from which he removed the blind that I might see it was getting clearer every moment. "You will give us some music, won't you, before you go?"

"Oh! Captain Montgomery, indeed I dare not stay," I answered.

"At least, then, you will promise to do so at another time?"

He was holding my hand, and I could feel the warm blood rush to my temples, the while I could not bring my tongue to utter a syllable. And then he whispered,—

"I am so glad I did not go to India. We might never have seen each other again. I was taken ill just as the regiment left, and am now on sick leave."

I told him I was glad, meaning not that he was on sick leave, but that he did not go; and then, seeing him smile, corrected myself, saying I meant I was sorry that he had been ill, but he did not look very ill then.

Shortly after we left, thanking our kind hostess for her hospitality, and when Gerald bid us good-night, I know I felt very happy at the thought of our meeting again.

On our arrival at Connaught-terrace Aunt Helen read us a severe lecture on what she styled the "impropriety of our conduct," in future assuring us we should not be permitted to go out alone.

"Captain Montgomery will most likely call in the morning, Auntie," I said. "Surely you will see him, and thank him for, maybe, saving our lives?"

She said she would, thus sending me to rest happy; and Florrie was glad she had taken such a fancy to the little gentle lady—Gerald's mother.

But to our disappointment the Captain did not come, or, at least, we thought so, notwithstanding that a double knock had reached our ears which had caused us much disgust to find it was a visitor for someone else.

Aunt Helen after lunch proposed a walk, for, though cold now, the weather was fine and bright, and I had descended to the hall, there to await her presence, for I was ready first, when a gentleman's card on the slab attracted my attention.

"When was this left, Annie?" I asked of

the girl, who was then coming out of Mrs. Melville's room, alluding to the piece of paste-board I still held in my hand.

"About an hour ago, miss. The tall, military gentleman called, to whom your Aunt said I was to say you wasn't at home."

"When?"

"This morning, miss, before you came down to luncheon."

"That will do," I said, for I heard footsteps on the stairs; and then I was glad we were going out into the cold, fresh air, for I felt my temples throbbing beneath my sealskin hat, the while my face was hot and burning, and in that moment I felt I almost hated my dead father's sister.

The next day Florrie came to me with the tears streaming from her beautiful eyes, and her whole frame shaking with her strong emotion.

"What is it, dear?" I asked. "What makes you so unhappy?"

"Oh, Veiva!" she cried, throwing her arms around my neck. "The bracelet Ernie gave me is gone. I can't find it anywhere, although I have turned out every box I possess, and the drawers as well. And that is not all—we are to leave here next week!"

"Leave here! Are you sure, Florrie?" I asked.

"Yes. Mrs. Melville told me so this morning—dear Mrs. Melville. Aunt Helen gave her notice yesterday, saying she was going to take us to Brighton for a time, and it was not certain when we should return."

"Then we shall come back here after awhile?" I said, brightening up; but Florrie could see no prospect of that.

"I don't believe Auntie has any intention of leaving London," she said, "and certainly none of returning here," and then her grief broke out afresh regarding the bracelet. "Who could have taken it?" she asked. She did not believe the servants dishonest for a moment; but what could have become of it?

Aunt Helen was quite as much concerned as we were at its loss, feeling sure she told Florrie that she must have put it away somewhere herself, and forgotten it, the same time that she knew that was not likely. Annie was equally as anxious that it should be found, saying she believed Miss Norman half-suspected she had it, the while Mrs. Melville declared she never heard of such a strange thing in all her life.

But so it was. It had disappeared as completely as though it had never been in her possession, and Florrie looking on its loss as a broken link in the chain of love which bound her to Ernie.

CHAPTER V.

THE RETURNED LETTER.

We did go to Brighton, as Auntie said we should, and were almost as delighted as when we first came to London. The sea, of course, was no novelty, but the surroundings were so different to those which our quiet beach, with its wide stretch of yellow sand, presented to us, and the grand pier, where beautifully dressed women congregated, from which the sounds of music floated to the ocean beyond, mingling with the murmur of the restless waves, endowed us with a satisfaction in our lot with which a short time since we felt inclined to grumble.

The air was soft and balmy, and although a mistiness came from the sea, there was an entire absence of that horrible fog which we had so lately experienced.

Auntie had previously engaged rooms near the Hove, so that—the same as with Mrs. Melville—everything was prepared for us on our arrival. I often wondered how it was, but Aunt Helen always seemed at home wherever she went, alighting on a spot which appeared as familiar to her as if we had returned to the old Rectory where we had lived all our lives. And so it was here, where we were made so comfortable that for the time I

thought no more of Captain Montgomery, or how strange he must think it our being denied to him when he called.

Florrie had written to Ernie, sending him our new address. "I did not name losing the bracelet," she told me, "as maybe Mrs. Melville will find it yet; for she assured me she would have every corner searched when we were gone, and I would not for worlds that he should think I so little prized his gift that I should so soon lose it." But Mrs. Melville in her letter at the end of the week gave no hope of its being found, and, in fact, she said it was a complete mystery what had become of it.

I could see how disappointed Florrie was; but that was not the worst, for although she had watched the postman each morning, in breathless anxiety, for a line from Ernie, none came.

"I am sure he must be ill, Veiva; nothing else would prevent his writing," she said.

"Oh, you may have a letter in the morning, dear!" I answered, and she had; and when her eyes rested on the writing, I saw the hot blood leap to her cheeks the while she pressed it to her lips, as though anxious to postpone the happiness of reading the words of love she knew it would contain.

She broke it open at last, and then, for a few minutes she sat like one paralysed, her eyes distended with untold agony, her lips parted, and the enclosure tightly grasped between her icy-cold fingers. I thought she would have fallen then, when placing my arm around her,—

"Florrie, my darling, what is it?" I asked.

But not a word escaped her, only her eyes turned to mine with such a world of pain depicted in them. The agony she was suffering was too great for words.

She had dropped the letter, and, picking it up from where it lay at her feet, I could see it was not Ernie's, but her writing which the envelope had enclosed, and then the dread truth broke upon me.

It was her own returned.

Aunt Helen came in then, asking what was the matter with Florrie, for she could not fail to see how white, how terribly ill, she looked.

I showed her the letter, and when I told her how it was,—

"My dear child, I expected this would happen some time since," she said, "but I had not the heart to tell her."

"Why, what do you mean, Auntie?" I asked.

"I heard from Mrs. Kirby, you must know, Veiva, before we left town, and she told me Ernie had a good prospect before him, that he was engaged to Mr. Bontle's (you know Bontle, the brewer?) youngest daughter, and that her father would give her on her marriage eight thousand pounds. They are enormously wealthy, and with this they are going to settle in New Zealand."

There was no occasion to warn Aunt Helen, for Florrie was now quite unconscious to all that was going on around her.

"Ernie never acted thus of his own free will," I asserted. "I will never believe it," and all the while I was chafing the hands of the inanimate girl.

"He would have been very foolish to have thrown away such a chance; for what opening was there for him in an out-of-the-way place like Haaboro, and, in fact, anywhere in England? What is farming in these days?"

"Nothing can excuse his cruel conduct, Auntie!" I answered. "And so I suppose he is going to leave the old country without even bidding adieu to those who have been as his own kith and kin. No, no! I never can think Ernie would act so cowardly a part!"

But I was silent then, for I could see a flicker beneath Florrie's closed eyelids, when she gave a faint sigh, and I knew she was coming round.

"Do you feel better, dearest?" I asked. "Drink this, it will revive you."

She put her lips to the stimulant I held to her.

"It must be the heat, Veiva," she said, notwithstanding that it was a cold day in November, with the chill of the first frost in the air; but I knew then pride had come to her rescue, and a short time after she was more lively than I had seen her for several days.

We had been in Brighton some time now, and, Christmas drawing so near, Auntie decided on returning to London.

"I think of taking a small house a little way out," she told us; "but for a time we cannot do better, I think, than go to Mrs. Melville, for it may be some weeks, even after your poor father's affairs are settled, before I shall meet with just what I like; and then the selection of furniture, &c., cannot be done in a day."

I often gave a thought to the fair, gentle lady at Eton-place, and could not understand Aunt Helen refusing to see Gerald when he called.

He had been so kind, and it was the last evening, when we were to leave the Sussex coast, that these thoughts seemed to run most in my mind.

Florrie and I were taking a walk, for the last time, staying to look from the parade where we were standing to the wild ocean beyond.

We had never seen it so rough before, and the wind blew so strong that it was with difficulty we could keep our feet; but, nevertheless, we experienced an enjoyment in the fury of the elements, which seemed to sympathise with our own feelings, the while it brought to our mind familiar scenes in our happy childhood, and in fancy we could see the billows madly tossing and foaming and leaping over the cliffs of our home shore.

"Don't be late, girls," Aunt Helen had said, for it was too cold for her to venture out herself, and the days were growing so short, too, now.

Even we had become chill, notwithstanding the fire with which we had protected ourselves, and my feet were getting quite numb.

"Come, Florrie," I said, "I think we had better return; for not only was I cold but I was triste and miserable, for she was so lost in thought that I could but with difficulty draw a word from her."

She turned then.

"It is cold, dear," she said, when a sudden gust caught her hat, and a moment after it had been carried below, and was merrily dancing before the wind on its way to sea. "It is no use waiting, Veiva. I shall never be able to catch it."

"No, but one of the fisherman may." We had better stay a minute, and even then I saw from where we were standing that its mad race had been brought to a close by someone who was coming in the opposite direction. "A gentleman has picked it up for you, dear. How fortunate it was that we stopped!"

"It would not have mattered much if we had not recovered it," she laughed; but shortly after I think she was glad as I was when we saw Captain Montgomery ascending the steps from the beach below, with the truant headgear in his hand.

He was evidently as surprised as we were when he saw to whom it belonged, and with a glad smile of recognition it was that he returned it to its owner, and a slight feeling of jealousy passed through my mind when I noted how admiringly he gazed on Florrie, with whose yellow tresses the wind was gaily sporting, tossing them hither and thither and leaving a crimson rose on each cheek where it had pressed its kisses.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, advancing to where we still stood. "I little thought who was the fair owner of the lost hat, or the capture would have been doubly exciting."

He restored it to Florrie then, who pressed it firmly on her pretty head; and then we shook hands, and I felt my face become as warm as hers.

"I am so glad to have met you, Captain

Montgomery!" I said. "You must have thought us so dreadfully ungrateful not to be at home to you after your great kindness in that awful fog; but it was not our fault—Florrie's and mine—you know!"

"Then you were at home, really?" he laughed. "And that naughty little girl who opened the door to tell me such a fearful untruth; but, you see, Miss Norman, fate is against you. We are to meet!"

He pressed my hand then, and in the waning light I could see the fun go from his eyes and there was a something more tender in the glance which came to mine.

"You will return with us, Captain Montgomery, won't you?" we asked. "I am sure Auntie will be glad to see you."

"I don't think so, really," he answered, in an amused tone; "for, if you will forgive my speaking the truth, I have an idea Auntie would be decidedly annoyed to see me, in that, for some unaccountable reason, I think she would rather we never met again. Are you going to remain here long?"

"We return to London to-morrow," I answered.

"How glad I am we met now, then!" May I know your address in town, and when my mother returns you must promise to come and see us again."

"It was the same," I told him, "Connaught-terrace," and then we shook hands, for we were close home, and we could not persuade him to come in.

But I lingered a moment behind, Florrie moving forward, for he seemed unwilling to let me go.

"Is not Lady Montgomery with you?" I asked, a sense of confusion coming over me, and scarcely knowing what I was saying.

"My mother never braves an English winter, but I shall endeavour to persuade her to return for Christmas. She is at Nice now."

"I am so sorry you won't come in, for I dare not stay here any longer. Auntie will be sure to ask Florrie what it is detains me."

An idea that some one had removed the blind to look from the window took possession of us both, so Gerald saw the necessity of my bidding him good-bye; besides, he could see I was shivering—the wind was so cold.

"I won't keep you, my darling!" he added, after a pause. "You are not angry, are you? but from the first I loved you, Veiva!"

He had drawn me so close to him then, was quite dusk, the varied coloured lights on the pier looking bright and pretty, with their background of dark grey sky, and I could feel his heart beating against mine as we stood there; and in that one moment I knew how dear he was to me!

I left him then, with his kisses still warm on my lips, for I knew Auntie would ask a hundred questions when I went in, which I should be unable to answer; for, to tell her of the relationship which now existed between myself and Gerald, I felt instinctively would be ringing the death-knell of my hopes.

It was our last night at Brighton, so we stayed up a little later, sitting by the window that we could watch the rise and fall of the distant waves, with the moon playing upon their waters.

I could not keep my secret from Florrie, and when we retired I told her of my great happiness, and then we went to sleep—at least I did, for I knew it was long—very long before she closed her eyes, as awaking once I heard her sobbing, and my shoulder, where her head rested, was wet with her tears.

CHAPTER VI

A STRANGE VISITOR.

We had left all the beautiful weather behind us, for we had not been in London a week before winter set in earnest, the wind blowing from the north-east, making the snow as it fell to collect in little heaps outside the windows and on the doorsteps.

We had not seen Gerald since the morning

when he was on the platform to bid us good-bye, but I had had several letters from him, taking care to secure them before they would have been brought, in the usual course, to Auntie first.

His mother was still away, but she had promised him to spend her Christmas at Eaton-place, for he had told her our secret, and she was anxious to receive me as her daughter.

"But I also have a secret, Gerald," she had written him. "One that will cause you a great surprise, but one that you must learn before you make Veiva Norman your wife."

I had met him by appointment, when he showed me this, and we both wondered what it could mean.

"Perhaps the matter is going to get married, too," he suggested, which only brought a smile to my face, for I could not fancy that sweet, gentle lady contemplating matrimony, with that big dragon, six feet high, calling her mother.

"I don't think so, Gerald," I said, quietly. And then he laughed, for I looked quite horrified at the idea.

"I don't think so, either, darling!" he replied, after which we both set ourselves to wondering why it was that Aunt Helen was so averse to visit Eaton-place, the while Lady Montgomery equally evaded forming her acquaintance.

One had the excuse of being in lodgings, which was the usual one Auntie brought forward, did we question her on the subject; but with her ladyship there was no similar plea, and even in Aunt Helen's case that would soon be remedied, for she had taken a bijou villa in the Fulham-road.

It was a sweet little house, with garden back and front, the windows which opened on to a tiny grass plot being shaded with wisteria, while behind there were steps leading to one of greater dimensions, in which flower-beds were out in different designs, a large tree growing at the further end, beneath its drooping boughs there being a summer retreat.

Of course, it all looked very dreary and miserable now, with patches of dirty snow lying here and there, but it was gradually growing very comfortable within under Auntie's supervision, who had made an elegant selection in regard to furniture.

We both agreed, Florrie and I, that we had never seen her so amiable, as, whilst superintending the arrangement, nothing that good taste could suggest and money purchase being omitted to render our pretty home perfect.

"Well, girls, how do you like it?" she asked, when, the day previous to our entering, we accompanied her to take a last survey of the work which had been left for Maple's men to complete.

"It is lovely!" I said, thinking, in the spring days of the new year, how bright it would all look, with the new, budding life around; and even Florrie became more cheerful in the contemplation of leaving Connaught-terrace.

"It will seem more like home here, Veiva," she said. "My eyes are so weary gazing on nothing but bricks and mortar," and when she raised them to mine filled with tears, I kissed the parted lips, drawing her towards me, knowing so well they were not shed for the green fields and soft meadows of our childhood's home.

It was only a fortnight to Christmas when we left Mrs. Melville's, and on our arrival at Wistaria Villa, everything was in readiness to receive us—large fires burning in each room, giving a look of cheerfulness within which fully compensated for the dreariness without.

The first few days passed happily enough; then came sad events thick and fast. Old Mrs. Kirby came up and told Aunt Helen that Kirby was dead, and Ernie had been ill. The news seemed to worry her terribly, but she would not tell us why, and one day she was suddenly stricken with paralysis, to our unbounded grief.

CHAPTER VII.

OUT OF EVIL COMES GOOD.

I WROTE to Gerald, telling him how matters were, and I was so glad when his answer came—so kind, and wishing his mother was in London, that she might console us.

It was a week now since Auntie had been ill, and, contrary to what we had expected, she was fully resigned to the fate which awaited her, and, so different was she to the Aunt Helen of old that I felt no fear in letting her into my secret.

So Christmas day came, dull and cheerless, with heavy grey clouds and falling snow; the chiming of the bells and the closed shops the only sign to us that it was the twenty-fifth of December, with the exception of the dinner, for which Auntie insisted that cook should come to her bedside to receive orders; and Nora, regardless of cold and wet feet, declared we should have no luck if we had not a sprig of holly, which she gathered from our own garden, to decorate the pudding.

"It is very dull for you, my child, and Florrie too. She must be very lonely in the drawing-room by herself," Aunt Helen said, when, after dinner, I ascended to sit by her side reading, as I generally did; and when I told her she preferred her music to joining us a look of something like pain passed over her countenance; and, notwithstanding the book I was reading was *Ouida's Under Two Flags* she liked so much, she did not seem to hear a word I was saying, and then she told me to close it.

"I should like so much, Auntie, to tell you what is in my mind," I said, after a few moments, during which I had been caressing the white thin hand, where the veins showed so plainly.

"Anything very important, dear?" and she smiled so kindly that I hesitated no longer to tell her of my engagement to Gerald, waiting for no reply, but dashing on to the end of my story, fearing to lose courage before I had finished.

But the opposition which I so much feared did not present itself, Auntie remaining very still and quiet when I had completed my confession, with a look on her face I could not understand.

She raised no objection, as I feared she would have done—in fact, offered no comment on what I had told her—only asking me of Florrie, and if I still thought she loved Ernest Hume.

I looked at her in surprise. "Love him! Auntie!" I said. "I don't think she will ever care for anyone else, and I can never forgive him for the cruel part he acted towards her."

"You must not blame him, Veiva!" I turned round in astonishment, for it was the first time Auntie had espoused his cause.

"Not blame him!" I answered, "for having cast a blight over all that is beautiful in youth?—faith in one another!"

She was silent for a little while, and I could see her features working, as though with some powerful influence; and then, raising herself on her elbow, she turned to where I was sitting.

"I have been a very wicked woman, Veiva," she said, "but this affliction"—and she looked down at her helpless side—"has shown me my sin in all its enormity!"

I did not answer; but I suppose the expression on my face showed my surprise at her words, for she paused awhile, and then added—

"It was all false that I told you of Ernie's change with regard to Florrie. He loves her—has always loved her; but I wanted to separate them, and so I sent back the bracelet he gave her when we left Hasboro', for I knew the conditions under which it was to be returned—telling him in a letter that I was deputed to do so by Florrie herself, who was engaged to be married to a wealthy gentleman here."

Aunt Helen stopped to recover her breath—she had spoken so hurriedly—the while I

drew my hand from hers—the very touch seeming to burn me.

"How could you be so wicked?" I asked, fiercely, forgetting for the moment her affliction—all, everything but the villainy of which she had been guilty.

"Don't look like that, Veiva!" she pleaded. "I—-you cannot see it in a worse light than I do myself;" and I saw the hot tears well to her eyes, softened as they had become in her repentance. "But they are both young still, and it is not too late to undo the evil I have done."

"But what motive had you for acting thus?" I asked, being unable to reconcile in my mind her wickedness with the mother's part she had in every other respect acted towards us. "Surely you had no spite against Ernie, although you lately seemed to have an aversion towards him. He could not have injured you?"

"He individually, no," she replied, "but it was the parents' sin which I would have visited on the child that made me do as I did. You remember, Veiva, when you returned from the beach, and I was sorting the books we should dispose of from your poor father's library. It was then, for the first time, that I learnt the secret of his birth—a secret which had been kept from me all those long years that I had resided with the brother, to whose children I had been as a mother."

It all came back to me then—the paper she had so quickly hidden on my discovering her on that day, and the remark made at that time how necessary it was to look carefully through each volume.

"I was young once, dear," she continued, "There were only three of us—your father, myself, and a younger sister, Gwendoline, and when I was twenty I was engaged to be married to one Cyril Holmes."

"He was an independent gentleman, wealthy, and in every respect considered a good match. My parents were delighted at my prospects, the while his raised no obstacle to the union."

"It was then he was asked on a visit to your grandfather's house, Gwendoline returning from school, having completed her education at the same time."

Aunt Helen paused then, and a spasm as of pain passed over her features.

"I can't relate all that transpired, Veiva," she said, "for even now the wrong she did me so rankles in my breast that it makes it too hard to forgive, and I want so much to be forgiven myself. But the end was, dear, she took my lover from me with her innocent ways—she but a child of seventeen—and, in my despair, on discovering his falseness and her duplicity, I took an oath to be revenged."

"The first poignancy of my grief passed, I became again my usual self, never letting a word escape me which should let them know how much I was suffering the while. When after a time the marriage took place, I acted as bridesmaid, pouring blessings on the bride with my lips, whilst the thirst for vengeance I felt was drying up the very sap of life within me."

"Gwendoline begged of me to go to her, when, after the lapse of time, a son was born to them; and I went, and it was then that the first seeds of my revenge were sown. When I left baby was a month old, and I knew that his parents would be as far from each other then as though they lived at the North and South poles."

"It was as I expected. Gwen would not listen to her husband's denial of the charge of infidelity which I led her to believe he was guilty of, and I determined that she should know no happiness beyond what she had already enjoyed, fanned the flame of her jealousy whenever we met, until after a scene, in which recriminations followed, she fled from his roof."

"What became of her, or where she went, no one knew. Cyril, who was heartbroken, notwithstanding he had tried every means to find her and the child, which she had taken

with her, being unable to meet with any clue to her whereabouts. And I almost repeated of the part I had played, when some years after I—when engaging a servant and inquiring the name of her last employer to whom I applied for her character—was surprised to discover in the lady to whom she referred me—Lady Gwendoline Montgomery, my long-lost sister."

I could not restrain a start when Aunt Helen named the little gentle lady, Gerald's mother, and then it all came to me why it was she would not visit Eaton-square.

"They were living at their country seat then—Elm Park," she continued. "And she told me that on Cyril's death she married Sir John Montgomery, she having when she left her husband engaged herself as governess in his sister's house. But he was dead now, and she had only her boy to live for in future."

"Her boy, I thought," Aunt Helen continued bitterly, "Cyril's son! And when she named him every wish I had had to become as we once were to each other fled. From that day we never met again, and until I discovered the letter which, in her great trouble, she had written, begging your father to take her little son, Cyril's child, I was in entire ignorance as to whom Ernest Hume was."

She fell back exhausted then. Poor Auntie, to whom revenge had been so sweet that it had embittered her whole life, the while pity and anger struggled within my own bosom for mastery when I considered how, by her wickedness, she had thrown a shadow over Florrie's youth.

But she seemed to read the thoughts which were passing through my mind.

"I should have relented, Veiva," she said, after a while; "for Mrs. Kirby told me how Ernie had never been the same lad since Miss Florrie had treated him so badly; and I am certain I have suffered as much as they, for I loved them both dearly."

She waited then, studying my face the while, afterwards begging me to forgive, even as I hoped to be forgiven.

But I could not at first bring my lips to part—they seemed so tightly closed; and then in the silence which ensued came to us the sound of the bells, ringing forth peace and goodwill to all. And in that moment I pressed her hand in mine, stooping to kiss the poor, careworn face, grown so old within the last few days, when the door opened, and Florrie entered.

And, when that night we retired to rest it was with tears of joy that her pillow was moistened, for she knew then that Ernie, her own darling, was true to his troth!

CONCLUSION.

TEN years have passed since then, and Aunt Helen is still alive, contrary to the doctor's predictions, having almost recovered the use of her side; and neither Gerald nor I will hear of her leaving us until she receives the last call, notwithstanding that she is for ever impressing on our minds how useless she is—an assertion we can most forcibly deny. For how would the little ones—and we have four—get on at all if she did not occasionally interfere to prevent Grandmamma Lady Montgomery from spoiling them entirely?

But then there are times when Florrie insists she shall be jealous if she does not visit her and Ernest in their little nest by the sea—the dear old sea—where she is so happy within sound of the waves!

And so Auntie went once—her last visit, she says, for she feels too old to travel now; and she told me I should never guess what it was the children pointed out to her as the most valuable of the drawing-room treasures, so mamma told them.

An old shell or two, of which they could gather hundreds off the coast each day, and some pretty seaweed, pink and grey, under a glass shade, and I knew they were those she had gathered—now ten years since!

[THE END]

MY LADY OF THE LAKE.

—30—

CHAPTER LV.—(continued.)

"THAT is kind of you!" Guy Forrester replied. "How glad my child-wife will be! Poor little woman! How she must have suffered! I never anticipated her being left alone. I would not have consented to that, although I could not refuse to leave her in her father's guardianship till she was of age. You see, Lady Dalkeith, both May and I thought more of the love in our hearts than of wisdom; for we rather laid ourselves open, you see, in marrying at all when May was under age, and Sir Roger used the fact as a lever to bend us to his will; for you will well understand that neither May nor I should have appreciated a scandal, nor my being punished. So I had to go away, and I was not allowed to communicate at all with my darling. But I always expected to be able to find her here, when I could do so safely, and was quite unprepared to learn that Sir Roger had hidden her from me. If love can track her out she shall be found!" he ended with spirit.

"Yes, find her," returned Lady Dalkeith, earnestly, "and whatever is for my daughter's happiness I will consent to and do. Do not lose an hour. Begin the search at once. But stay—how inhospitable you must think me!" and she rose and rang the bell to order some refreshment for May's husband, and would have had a substantial meal brought in for him, but that he declined it upon the plea that he had lunched at the hotel in St. Ormo while the dog-cart was being prepared.

When the wine was before him, she again urged upon him the necessity of his beginning to seek for his wife without delay, and she noticed something strange in his manner.

"Truly I will as soon as I can," he answered, with hesitation, "but I must first earn the 'sinews of war.' I am not ashamed to own that I am a poor man, and that my star has not lately been in the ascendant. Travelling and searching are both expensive matters. It seems so heartless and cold-blooded to say this, but what can I do? I am obliged to confess the truth."

"Of course you are," she replied, kindly, "but you must let me help you. Of what use is my wealth if I cannot spend it in carrying out one of the very dearest wishes of my heart?" and she laid her hand kindly upon his shoulder.

"You are wonderfully good," he exclaimed, this time with feeling which was really not assumed, for her kindness had penetrated even the thick hide of his selfish nature, and touched him with a passing pin prick.

"You are very kind, but I am ashamed to burden you with my poverty and troubles," he answered, and she liked him none the less for his reply.

"Your troubles must be May's troubles, and May's troubles must be mine," she said, gently, "and you must not mind accepting my help."

Mind! Was this not what he had been playing this bold game for? Yet, so perverse is human nature, that he wished he had never acted the false part he was doing.

In the most despicable character the nobleness of a better mind will at times touch some chord which will give out fair music, even though it is red with the rust of sin.

It is the stamp of the Divine Maker of the mind, before it was choked with the baneful weeds of earth, which no evil power can quite efface, and when listened to, the words which come to that music are those of repentance; but, alas! it seldom is listened to.

There is a painful vibration in the heart when that music is heard, and the easiest thing to stop it is to place the worldly hand upon the strings, and the sounds will cease—perhaps, for ever.

She thought the idea of taking her money

was painful to him, and she changed the conversation with tact.

"I have already two things to thank you for," she said. "For bringing me before my daughter as you did in the picture you painted of me for her; and for having also painted this picture, for it is my greatest pleasure," and she raised her eyes to the life-study of May Dalkeith.

"My wife valued the former greatly," he answered, with a smile. "In fact, that picture drew us very closely together, I am sure, Lady Dalkeith."

"And is my daughter so beautiful as that, or did you use the artists' licence?" inquired the mother, eagerly.

"She was every whit as beautiful, sometimes more so. There were expressions which I have never been able to put on canvas."

Lady Dalkeith turned to speak to him and started.

"Can we ever have met before?" she asked.

"Never, I should say!" But why?"

"When you smile like that you look younger, and then your face seems familiar to me—as familiar as the name of St. Clement's Church."

"How strange!" he returned, somewhat uneasily. "Loving May, you must have seen me in your dreams. May herself would have thought it quite possible."

"Would she?" she questioned. "Then she was imaginative, but I have never been so. Still, there is sympathy between hearts which love, and it is possible."

CHAPTER LVI.

LADY DALKEITH TELLS CELESTINE HER GOOD NEWS.

LADY DALKEITH'S words puzzled Guy Forrester very much indeed, and made him dimly and vaguely uneasy. But he had certainly never been in Australia, although he had once, in the days long since gone by, pretended to a confiding woman that he had done so. Still, it was most unlikely that she and Lady Dalkeith should ever have met, and Mr. Forrester forgot the truism that it is the "unexpected which always happens."

Moreover, that woman had never heard of Guy Forrester, so that he was safe. And, besides, even had she seen Lady Dalkeith, it would not have made her ladyship familiar with his features.

And with this thought he lalled himself once more into a feeling of security, and remained talking over his plans for finding May with her mother, until he suddenly recollected the dog-cart outside, and the account which was running up for it with the landlady at the hotel at Great St. Ormo, and the thought aroused him.

All had gone well so far. He had managed Lady Dalkeith a great deal better than he had done the late Baronet, and he was quite satisfied with his day's work.

He felt that he had had a grand success, and thought it inadvisable to prolong the meeting too much, and even though, to use his cousin Gerald Andrew's words, he had found another goose to lay golden eggs for him; that was no reason why he should waste the eggs on what gave him no pleasure.

So he rose to take his leave, and undoubtedly he would have gone quicker still, had he for one moment dreamed that only a ceiling and a floor hid the secret of his guilt.

As it was, he stood with Lady Dalkeith's hand warmly held between his own.

"What grieves me is to think that our darling is all alone; and I fear she must be penniless, for Sir Roger told me he would never let his wealth pass into her hands, lest it should come into mine," said the artist, sadly.

"Take comfort!" replied her ladyship, kindness shining from her sweet face. "I hope and believe that May has an old and valued servant with her."

"What! Mrs Wheeler?"
 "Yes. Do you know her!"
 "Rather! She was a witness to our marriage. But who told you about that?"
 "Old Thomas."
 "Old Thomas! What! You have him still, then?"
 "Yes. I would not part with him for anything! He was devoted to May."
 "Ah! I remember him—a rough, ignorant, good-hearted old fellow!" and Guy decided that fond as he was of his gold, a "tip" would not be lost upon Thomas Mandrake.

And when Lady Dalkeith asked him to excuse her for a few moments he suggested that he would like to stroll round the garden to see the old haunts where May and he had wandered together; and she, thinking his desire quite natural, bade him go by all means. He went, and found old Thomas in the kitchen-garden hard at work.

Thomas Mandrake looked at him in a dazed, bewildered sort of way, as though he did not know whether to treat the new-comer as a friend or enemy—whether to greet him with a smile or a prod of the sharp fork with which he was turning up the ground.

He could not forget his mistrust of artists in general, nor of how trouble had followed quickly upon his advent at Lake St. Ormo; although all the real truth had been religiously kept from him at her master's orders by Mrs. Wheeler.

Old Thomas had mistrusted Guy Forrester, and did so still. But, like most other people, he was not outside the pale of his powerful influence.

"Thomas," he said, warmly shaking the gardener's unwilling hand, "I have come to tell you a secret. You cannot fail to know that Miss May and I are very fond of each other, and I want you to be one of the first to hear that I have seen Lady Dalkeith, and that my dear girl and I are going to be very happy. I have told her ladyship all about my making love to her in Sir Roger's absence, and she has forgiven me!"

"Do you mean all that, Mr. Forrester?" queried the old man, looking at him doubtfully.

"Every word of it! Miss May and I have got over our troubles. Lady Dalkeith is a right-down good, sensible woman, with her daughter's happiness at heart, and does not care whether I am a duke or an artist, so long as I make her child happy."

"That's it! That's it, sir! You ought to have been a book writer if you wanted a profession. You put it so straight and plain. That's it! And if you means fair by Miss May, and will bring back the sunshine upon her sweet, young face, old Thomas will say 'Heaven bless you!'" and having rushed at Guy's hand, with fervour this time, he wrung it till the artist winced, and ended by flinging his cap up so high that it landed on the branches of an apple-tree, so securely that it would not be shaken down, which cooled old Thomas' ardour. "There now!" he said, regretfully "it's an old 'un, to be sure, but I've only got my best besides, and it's too good to work in, but I must get it, for I'm quick to catch cold without 'un, so there's no choice."

"Stay, Thomas," laughed Guy, "here is some golden ointment. It will save you catching cold, I doubt not, for it will purchase a new cap for you, and some whisky to rub your head with, unless you prefer to take it inside, in which case you can drink Miss May's health and happiness as Mrs. Guy Forrester," and with a smile and a nod the artist turned back to the house, walking at a brisk pace.

Thomas Mandrake stood looking at the retreating figure with a bewildered expression of face.

There was a certain amount of shrewdness in his composition which whispered to him that people do not usually part with gold without an object, and he was trying to think what it was that Guy Forrester wanted of him. And the old distrust of the artist began to simmer in his mind again. In truth, he liked

Guy better before he gave him that coin—believed in him more.

But Thomas was uncommonly fond of money; and, if the truth must be told, there was an old grey worsted stocking hidden away in his mattress with the boardings of many years. In his room over the stable, and when the door was locked at night, there he used to sit at the shabby deal table, counting out the coins with glittering eyes and eager fingers.

In fact, Thomas might have had a great deal more pleasure in his life but for this hoard and the miser vein which ran through his nature.

And now he chuckled as he thought how the gold would shine, laid out on the table, by the light of his tallow candle, and how it would chink as he dropped it among the other coins in the grey stocking!

The artist was out of sight by the time he had in imagination placed it there.

"I wonder what he wants!" he muttered, as he suddenly thought of a clothes-prop as a means of getting down his old cap, and shuffled off to find one.

"Well, he has paid in advance for it, whatever it is. P'raps it's silence! I'm glad Miss May's going to be happy after all!"

He secured the prop, and by its means the old cap, and chuckled over it as a treasure.

"I needn't buy another after all," he muttered, and, after affectionately feeling the sovereign again and again, he took out his old leather pouch, and having first carefully wrapped it up in a piece of newspaper which he tore off his ounce of tobacco, he placed it in a safe corner, and went on with his work, while Guy Forrester entered the dining-room by the French window, and found Lady Dalkeith waiting for him with an envelope in her hand.

"There is little or no change in the old place," he said, with a smile, "and Thomas looks as though he had never moved out of the bed of potatoes since last I was here. Poor old fellow, he seemed surprised to see me. I daresay he has no very friendly feeling towards me, and he may associate me, in what mind he has, with May's troubles."

"Very possibly," answered her ladyship, with a smile, recollecting many of old Mandrake's digs at "artist chaps and them like critters" in his talks to her. But since the man knew nothing for certain there was not much for him to say.

"Good-bye, Lady Dalkeith," said Guy, with fervour. "I shall never, never, forget your kindness to me to-day so long as I live, and I hope in the future both May and I will be able to repay you for it."

"Find her without loss of time; make her happy, and I shall be amply repaid," she returned, "and, Mr. Forrester, begin at once. Do not lose an hour. You will have a better chance than anyone else."

"Love will instinctively lead you to her, surely; and, besides, you know her tastes, and can form ideas as to where she would be likely to hide. I cannot think why she has not come home. She must have heard of Sir Roger's death. Sometimes the terrible thought comes to me that May has gone to the invisible world also," she added, with a catch at her breath; "but if so, would not Mrs. Wheeler return here for her property? She has left many valuables in her room, and stores of clothes!"

"No, May is not dead," replied Guy, decidedly. "Do not fret, mother, and I will soon restore your daughter to your arms, a very different child to her from whom you parted so many years ago."

"Do so, and I will bless you," she answered, with emotion, as she pressed the envelope into his willing palm. "Spare no expense, Mr. Forrester. When this is gone let me know, and I will send you another cheque," and she passed quickly out of the room to avoid his thanks.

He looked at the envelope quite as lovingly as Thomas had done at the shining gold-piece, and longed to open it to see what it contained.

But the "lively anticipation" in his heart, "of future favours," withheld him from so imprudent and ungentelemanly an act, and he went slowly out to his dog-cart, and, mounting to the box-seat, he drove off in first-rate style, while Lady Dalkeith ascended the stairs to try and cheer Celestine with her good news.

Alas! could that poor aching little head have been lifted, and those dark eyes have looked out of the window at that very moment, Lady Dalkeith would have known the utter mockery of her words; but she did not know, and she went quietly into the darkened room, and sat down by Madame St. Croix's side.

"Celestine," she said, with a glad thrill in her voice, "I wonder if you are well enough to listen? I have heard some bright and happy news to-day. I think I shall, before long, find my daughter."

Celestine was fairly aroused. She lifted herself, and looked at her friend wonderingly.

"Oh! my dear friend," she cried eagerly. "I am so, so glad. I had fairly given up all hope."

"Never do that, Celestine! *Nil desperandum* is an excellent motto, and one which my family have borne for ages; but, oh! I have so much to tell you. My husband's strange words are explained at last. Do you remember he spoke of May's sorrow, and of her secret?"

"Yes, indeed, poor girl!"

"Well, her secret was that she had married the man she loved, and her sorrow that her father disapproved of the union, and parted her from him."

"Had I loved him I would not have left him," cried Celestine, fervently.

"May was very, very young," answered Lady Dalkeith, gently. "No doubt she was very much afraid of her father; and, besides, I fear Mr. Forrester had laid himself open to punishment for wedding a minor."

"Mr. Forrester! Is that his name, *cherie*? I like it; it is picturesque."

"So is its owner. May's husband has been to see me to-day. The next time he comes you must give me your opinion of him, Celestine."

"Do you like him?" inquired the Frenchwoman, eagerly.

"He would not be my choice," replied Lady Dalkeith, "but if he is May's, what does that matter?"

"Not at all, if she loves him," returned Celestine, softly, and laid her weary head upon her pillow again.

CHAPTER LVII.

NEMESIS I.

ALL the way to the station Guy Forrester's fingers were itching to break the adhesive of the envelope lying snugly in his breast-pocket, but he was too well aware that servants have eyes and ears, and tongues too, to make himself conspicuous by opening the letter; and he did not do so until he found himself alone in a first-class compartment on his return journey to London, having called at the hotel by the way and picked up his bag and railway wraps, paid his bill, and driven straight on to the station.

The "boots" looked after him with a strange expression in his shrewd, ugly little eyes, with a vivid remembrance in his mind of that matutinal visit of the beautiful young stranger of whose sweet face he had managed to get a sight, notwithstanding her thick veil.

When no one was present, Guy quickly made himself conversant with the amount placed at his disposal, avowedly to enable him to find his wife, but, in reality, he intended a very small portion to be so spent, and the rest he meant to supply his own pleasures.

The cheque was for a hundred pounds, and Mr. Forrester intended this to be far from his last application to the pump-handle of Lady Dalkeith's affection; in fact, he thought that his new goose would prove more prolific than

the stubborn, hard-hearted old gander, whom he had found it so impossible to manage.

So far he flattered himself he had had very much his own way with her ladyship, and, having got in the narrow edge of the wedge, he meant to insert the whole block.

His thoughts were very busy on his journey, and before he arrived in London he had made up his mind what to do.

Mark Ford should look for May! He would do it cheaper and better than anyone he knew.

He was so quiet and unobtrusive, so insignificant, that no one took any more notice of his creeping in and out than if he were a tom cat with a hole made on purpose for him through the scullery door.

He had left Mark in a cheap lodging in Paris, but he would send for him now to come to him, and when he had started him off on his searching tour, he would go and enjoy himself for a time.

He carried out his programme, and spent ninety pounds, while Mark Ford expended ten, and both the men enjoyed themselves in their different ways. Both were supposed to be looking for May, but one prosecuted the search with as little trouble as the other.

Guy wrote glowing accounts of the class he was following up, to Lady Dalkeith, and Mark Ford communicated in a quite legal fashion the upshot of his supposed research. But the men drew chiefly upon their imaginations in the wording of their letters.

At the end of a month Guy turned up again at Lake St. Ormo Cottage, and had another interview with May's mother.

She received him with utmost kindness. His constantly avowed anxiety to find his wife touched the woman's gentle heart, and she believed in all the efforts which he assured her he was making.

Very willingly she agreed to give him another cheque to carry on the search which seemed so likely to be successful, and he accepted the favour most gracefully.

It may be thought strange that she should never have shown Guy's letters to Madame St. Croix, but Lady Dalkeith had very strong opinions of what was and what was not honourable, and she did not deem it right to show letters—although she often talked to Celestine of Guy and his devotion to his young wife, who he was trying so hard to find, and poor Celestine heard it all with keen interest.

She was out sketching, with little Mary for her companion, upon this, Guy's second visit, the child rejoicing in the sweet, country air and the fields full of wildflowers. In fact, these two did a great deal of rambling about the lovely neighbourhood, both enjoying it very much, although a new sadness seemed to have settled upon the little Frenchwoman.

A tall, manly figure too often floated before her imagination for her own happiness, and she could feel a strong hand clasp hers, and a pair of true, blue eyes seemed to look straight into her heart and to make it quiver. Each day Celestine seemed more to realize the worth of Frank Masouline, but she despaired of ever seeing him again, silly little woman, and kept the secret of her sorrow within her own breast, lest Mrs. Roslyn, as she still called her in her heart, should think her lacking in affection and gratitude.

Had Madame St. Croix known that Guy was coming to St. Ormo Cottage she would most certainly have remained indoors, as she was very anxious to see him.

As it was, he had a second satisfactory *étouffé* with Lady Dalkeith, and was already in possession of another hundred pounds, when Celestine came in at the garden gate with Mary clinging to her arm; and as they came along, partly for her own pleasure and partly for the amusement of the child, she sang, "*Si tu savais comme je t'aime*," in a rich, full, mellow voice.

It was in no way to be compared with that of Lady Dalkeith in volume or finish; but it was very sweet, and as she rendered the fond words, they were full of pathos and meaning.

It is to be supposed that Guy Forrester

thought so, for he appeared to be listening attentively, and a sudden pallor overspread his features.

"Who is singing?" he inquired, in an awestricken voice, his great, dark eyes fixed upon those of Lady Dalkeith. "I seem to have heard the song before. It is full of fervour and passion."

"Yes! my companion sings remarkably well, poor girl. Her heart and soul seemed to go out in the words of certain favourite love-songs. She has a deep and affectionate nature, which has been touched to the inmost core by the most sad circumstances which can blight the heart of a loving woman. She gave away her love to a man totally unworthy of it, and he was wicked and cruel enough to desert her."

"No one knows what that poor girl suffered in mind and body. But, thank Heaven, she can be subjected to such treatment no more, for the unnatural creature to whom she owed her allegiance has passed beyond man's judgment—and gentle Celestine would be the last woman in England to say aught against him."

Had Lady Dalkeith been looking at Guy Forrester as she spoke, she would have seen the terrible effect her words were having upon him; but she did not see, for she was watching the lithe figure of the Frenchwoman coming over the lawn, with the child clinging to her with loving confidence, and unfastening the French window to admit her to see Guy Forrester.

As so Guy, he stood there, pale and aghast, a look of horror in his wonderful eyes. Had she seen a veritable ghost, such a look might have been anticipated, but no usual or natural emotion could possibly produce it, and the singer came on:

"*Si tu savais!*"

Oh! If only he had known! Not how much she had loved him—for he was well aware of that—but that Nemesis was tracking his footsteps at the very time he was flattering himself upon his great success, he would undoubtedly have kept a hundred miles away from Lake St. Ormo.

Every note of the sweet voice vibrated with agony in his heart. Exposure was a sad and sorry thing for Guy Forrester. It meant moral ruin.

He would from henceforth be a branded man; and, what was more, the gold mine, the wealth of which he meant for his own, must be given up, and for ever.

Here was a position for him, to find himself with two wives, both of whom loved him, even if he escaped the punishment of the law.

He grasped the back of the nearest chair for support, and stood looking with a fixed stare at the window through which his wife—his real wife—would come in, the woman who had aroused the passion in his heart more than any other he had ever known.

But at that moment he absolutely hated her, as the cause, innocent though she was, of the great trouble which was now coming upon him.

(To be continued.)

FACETIÆ.

THERE is one class of men who are, without exception, in favour of protective duties. They are night-watchmen.

We never knew a chiropodist to be at all disturbed at reports of the corn crop being injured by the frost.

"Yes," said Mr. Newpop, "I'm head of the firm in town, but when I'm home nights I'm floor-walker most of the time."

CHEAPER TO STAY AT HOME.—Janga: "Hello, old man! Back from the mountains again?" Bangs: "Yes. Back again." Janga: "What do you think of the mountains as a health resort?" Bangs: "Well, I think it's cheaper to stay at home and hire a doctor. Health comes darned high up there."

"WHAT will you take?" asked the jovial barkeeper, of a buzz-saw he was fooling with. "About three fingers of your best," replied the buzz-saw, and it did.

SHE: "Harry, you would make a poor soldier." He: "A poor soldier! Why, Maude?" She: "Because you don't seem to know how to use your arms." (Tableau.)

YOUNG WIFE: "Before we were married, George, you never smoked in my presence." Young Husband: "I know it, my dear, and you never wore curl-papers in mine."

CITIZEN: "What are you doing with that man?" Policeman: "I've just arrested him." Citizen: "But he's as deaf as a post." Policeman: "He'll get his hearing before the magistrate."

SHOCKED MOTHER: "Oh, you bad boy! I've just heard you were fighting with that boy next door. Don't you ever quarrel with him again." Small Son: "I ain't likely to. He kin lick me."

ROBINSON (at the club): "You are getting to be a great club man, Brown. I see you are here every night now. Wife away?" Brown: "No; she insisted upon it that I must buy her a piano—and I did."

TWIST HART: "You seem to be a superlatively happy man, George. When I saw you two years ago you were smiling all over." "I had just been married then." "And you are smiling as hard as ever now." "Yes; I've just secured a divorce."

SOME SOUND ADVICE.—Customer (in restaurant): "Gimme some broiled chicken, waiter, and as I'm in a big hurry, you had better bring it cold." Waiter: "If y'use in a big hurry, sah, I wud advise yo' to take it hot." Customer: "Why?" Waiter: "Kase it'll take or long-time fo' dat chicken to cool, sah."

HEN LAST CHANCE.—An irate woman entered a drapers the other day and accosted one of the clerks: "I've come to find out what you mean by charging me five shillings Saturday night for that tablecloth, and selling Mrs. Ferguson one just like it on Monday for five shillings. Didn't you say it was my last chance to get one so cheap?" "You mistook me, madam," responded the ready clerk; "I said it was your last chance to get one for five shillings. And it was, for we put them down to four shillings Monday morning."

HIS SENTENCE REMITTED.—"Evelyn," said young Mr. Buttercup, huskily, "speak one word of hope to me. Do not crush me with your disdain. You say you do not love me now, but if I should come to you at some future time, perhaps—perhaps—oh, Evelyn, you see my sad condition. Ought I not to receive something more than a cold dismissal?" "Perhaps so, considering your condition," said Evelyn, softly. "Then," exclaimed the young man, joyously, "you would change your sentence to—?" "Three months," murmured the beautiful girl.

FASHION.

Fashion is a goddess. She is ov the maskuline, feminine and nter gender.

Men worship her in her maskuline form, wimmin in her feminine form, and the excentricks in her nter gender.

She rules the world with a straw, and makes all her suppliants.

She enlaves the poor as well as the rich, she kneels in sanctuaries, poms in cabins, and leers at the street corners.

She fits man's foot with a pinching boot, throttles him with a stubborn collar, and dies his mustash wi h darkness.

She trails the rich silks ov wimmin along the filthy sidewalks, leads sore-eyed lap-dogs with a string, and banishes helpless children to murky nurseries, in the kare ov faithless hirelings.

She cheats the excentric with the clap-trap ov freedom, and makes him serve her in the habiliments ov the harlequin.

JOSE BILLINGS.

SOCIETY.

In the presence of the Empress Augusta, the Empress Frederick, and other members of the German Imperial family, and the Duke of Sparta, the foundation-stone of the mausoleum of the Emperor Frederick was laid at Potsdam on the 18th October, the anniversary of his birth. The municipal authorities of Berlin have presented an address to the Empress Frederick, announcing their desire to set apart 500,000 marks (£25,000) to the establishment of some institution of public utility as a memorial of the late Kaiser. The Empress Frederick, who was deeply moved during the reading of the address, in reply expressed to the Chief Burgomaster her heartfelt thanks for the action taken by the municipality, and promised to do her utmost to make the new institution useful, as desired by the founders.

The Czar and Czarina and the other members of the Imperial family met with an enthusiastic reception on their arrival at Baku. Among the numerous deputations who came to greet His Majesty, the one that attracted most attention was a deputation from the Tarooman tribes of the Transcaucasian province, which included the widow and two sons of the former Khan of Merv. The Taroomans after handing their Majesties bread and salt on a richly-wrought silver, presented the Czarina with carpets and other stuffs worked by the Tekke women, while to the Czarowitch they gave a sword studded with jewels. In the afternoon the Imperial party were present at the ceremony of laying the foundation-stone of a new orthodox cathedral at Baku. The Czar and Czarina at Baku on the 20th ult. witnessed the passage of a caravan, consisting of camels, mules, and one-horse high-wheeled vehicles. In the evening the Czarina, accompanied by the Czarowitch, paid a visit to the ancient-Parsee fire temple of Atesh-Gah, afterwards inspecting the works of the Baku Naphtha Company. The Czar, with the members of the Imperial family, has minutely inspected the Nobel Naphtha Works, the Bala Khan Naphtha Springs, and the Schibajeff Works.

H.R.H. THE DUKE OF CONNAUGHT held a military Levée at Poona on October 1. His Royal Highness has been pleased to found a permanent prize for drawing in the Poona Native Institution. The children of the Duke and Duchess, who are staying at Balmoral with the Queen, are to proceed to India, under charge of Sir John McNeil.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS CHRISTIAN are expected to return to Cumberland Lodge, Windsor Great Park, upon the conclusion of their visit to the Continent.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR of Wales fulfilled a series of public engagements on the 20th ult. at Manchester, where he was the guest of the Corporation. He was first presented with a loyal address from the citizens, and was subsequently entertained at luncheon in the Town Hall. Afterwards His Royal Highness opened a public recreation ground at Rusholme, laid the foundation-stone of a new wing of the Ancoats Hospital, and opened a new club for working lads. The Prince, Lord Egerton of Tatton, Earl Amherst, the Hon. A. Portman, the Hon. Arnold Keppel, Mr. Holford, and Mr. Bruce Wentworth shot over the Ashley estates on the 22nd ult. Only the smaller coverts were taken, but moderately good bags were made, including 150 hares, 220 pheasants, and twenty-three various. On the following day they went over the Rostherne estate. Prince Albert Victor and his host, Lord Egerton of Tatton, hunted with the North Cheshire hounds on the 23rd ult. There was a hoar frost during the night, but the sun shone brilliantly during the day. On Wednesday afternoon the Prince, with his host, Lord Egerton of Tatton, and his attendants, drove to Ashley station, and left shortly afterwards for York.

STATISTICS.

THE longest through car service of any railroad line in the world is said to be on the Southern Pacific road, between New Orleans and San Francisco—2,495 miles. The fastest through train on this road is timed at one hundred and thirteen hours twenty-five minutes, or twenty-two miles an hour.

THE French Minister of Agriculture has issued a report upon the forests of Europe, from which we learn that the woodlands of Russia cover five hundred million acres, or thirty-seven per cent. of the entire area of the country. In Sweden forests cover thirty-nine per cent. of the area, and twenty-four per cent. in Norway. By far the smallest proportion of woodland is to be found in England, Denmark, Portugal and Holland.

GEMS.

As continued health is vastly preferable to the happiest recovery from sickness, so is innocence to the truest repentance.

MODESTY is a kind of shame or shyness proceeding from the sense a man has of his own defects compared with the perfections of him whom he comes before.

DEATH is the liberator of him whom freedom cannot release; the physician of him whom medicine cannot cure; and the comforter of him whom time cannot console.

MOST men call fretting a minor fault—a foible and not a vice. But there is no vice, except it be drunkenness, which can so utterly destroy the peace and happiness of a home.

THROUGH zeal knowledge is gotten; through lack of zeal knowledge is lost. Let a man who knows this double path of gain and loss thus place himself that knowledge may grow.

WHATEVER mitigates the woes or increases the happiness of others is a just criterion of righteousness. One should not quarrel with a dog without a reason sufficient to vindicate one through all the courts of morality.

SOME people are "of course" able, as others are equally of course unable. It seems to be set down for them and accepted; and it takes a long time for themselves or for others to change the attitude or the impression.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PEAR AND QUINCE MARMALADE.—Two dozen juicy pears, ten ripe quinces, juice of three lemons, three-quarters pound of sugar to every pound of fruit; after it is ready for cooking, a little cold water; pare and core the fruit, and put in cold water, while you stir parings and cores in a little water to make the syrup; when boiled strain off the liquid; when cold put in the sliced fruit, and bring to a fast boil. It should be thick and smooth before the lemon juice and sugar go in. Cook steadily an hour longer, working with a wooden spoon to a rich jelly. When done put into small jars while warm, but do not cover until cold.

PICKLED WALNUTS.—Take large French walnuts and pare them till the white part appears; but be very careful not to cut too deep. Have a pan of salt-and-water close by, and drop each nut into it as pared or they will get black. Have ready a lined saucepan full of boiling water in which is a handful of salt put the walnuts into this, and let them boil quickly for five minutes; then take them out and spread between two clean cloths. When they are cold, put them into wide-mouthed bottles and fill up with strong vinegar, putting a blade of mace and a teaspoonful of salad oil into each bottle; cork down the next day, and keep in a dry place.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TRUTH is infinite, and we cannot clasp it in our finite arms; yet we may live in its light, and learn more and more of its grand meaning, if we but sincerely, honestly, and patiently tread the straight road of intellectual virtue.

A COSTLY CROWN.—The diadem in which Queen Victoria was crowned, June 28, 1838, is much more tasteful and manageable than that of her predecessor, George IV., which weighed nearly seven pounds. Queen Victoria's crown weighs about three pounds, and is composed of bands of silver, entirely covered with precious stones, and topped with a ball covered with small diamonds, surmounted by a Maltese cross composed of brilliants, and bearing in its centre a large sapphire. A splendid heart-shaped ruby, once owned by Edward the Black Prince, adorns the face of the cross which is in the front of the crown, and below this is an enormous oblong sapphire. There are two large centre diamonds valued at £2,000 each, and four diamonds on the tops of crosses, each worth £10,000; two circles of pearl around the rim cost £800, and there are besides, emeralds, rubies, sapphires and clusters of pearls to the value of £111,000. The whole crown is lined with deep blue velvet, and surrounded with ermine.

FEATS OF ARABIAN FANATICS.—For those whose ravenous appetites he was content to humour the most singular repast was prepared. A plate was brought in, covered with huge jagged pieces of broken glass, as thick as a shattered soda water bottle. With greedy chuckles and gurglings of delight one of the hungry ones dashed at it, crammed a handful into his mouth, and crunched it up as though it were some exquisite dainty, a fellow disciple calmly stroking the exterior of his throat, with intent, I suppose, to lubricate the descent of the unwelcome morsels. A little child held up a snake or sand-worm by the tail, placing the head between his teeth, and gulped it gleefully down. Several acolytes came in, carrying a big stem of the prickly pear, whose leaves are as thick as a one-inch plank, and are armed with huge projecting thorns. This was ambrosia to the starving saints; they rushed at it with passionate emulation, tearing at the solid alaba with their teeth, and gnawing and munching the coarse fibres, regardless of the thorns which pierced their tongues and cheeks as they swallowed them down.

OLD LACE.—Many of our girls do not know why old lace is often so much more valuable, and generally so much more beautiful, than new. The fact is that the valuable old lace is all woven in lost patterns. It is frequently as fine as a spider's film, and cannot be reproduced. The loss of patterns was a severe check to lace-making in France and Belgium, and was occasioned by the French revolution. Before that, whole villages supported themselves by lace-making, and patterns were handed down from one generation to another. They were valuable heir-looms, for the most celebrated weavers always had as many orders as they could execute in a lifetime, and they were bound by a solemn oath to work only for certain dealers. When the Reign of Terror began, all work of this kind was interrupted for a time. After the storm had subsided, the dealers and workers were far apart—some dead, some lost, and some escaped to foreign lands, and such of the women as remained were bound by their oath to work for but one; and this oath, in spite of Robespierre's doctrines, was held by the poorest of them to be binding, and there were instances where they suffered actual want rather than break their word. Some, however, taught their children and their grandchildren, and many patterns were in this way preserved. Some of the daintiest and finest patterns were never recovered, and to-day specimens of these laces are known to be worth their weight in gold.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

—O—

C. R.—Ermine is pronounced "Ermeence," Pepita, "Pepeeta."

ONE OF "PRINCE ALBERT'S OWN."—You can obtain the information from any good bookseller in the town.

LILLIAN JANE.—Leave your hair alone, except in the way of keeping it thoroughly clean and frequently brushed.

R. N. W.—If nature forbids the growing of a beard, any preparation which is claimed to produce that ornament is liable to be unsuccessful.

QUEENIE ST. AUGUST.—1 and 2. We must request you to consult a medical man. 3. Soak them in dilute sulphuric acid. 4. We never give tradesmen's addresses.

FANNIE J.—Take no notice. If he cares for you really he will come back; if not, you need not trouble about him. "There are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught."

S. R.—If the reception is held in the daytime, an escort would not be strictly necessary, although, of course, one would be very desirable. But if the reception is held in the evening, and it be in a large city, either an escort or a chaperon is imperative.

U. D. C.—1. Gladys is pronounced as if spelled Gladia. 2. The "Tar Kokolok" (king of bells) as the great bell in the Kremlin, at Moscow, is called, weighs 448,772 pounds, is nineteen feet three inches in height, and measures sixty feet nine inches about its margin.

R. N. W.—According to the laws of etiquette, it is not proper for a young lady to receive presents from a young gentleman, unless he is a relative. A lady may accept the escort of a gentleman to a place of amusement whether she is "keeping company" with him or not.

ADELA.—The lady should remain seated, the gentleman rise and bow. 2. "I am very pleased to make your acquaintance." 3. The 28th October, 1873, fell on a Tuesday; 29th June, 1875, also on a Tuesday; and 29th November, 1877, on a Thursday. 4. Nothing that is not also injurious. 5. Ordinary white soap. 6. Moderate.

W. J. S.—There are some who object to the intermarriage of first cousins, but it may be questioned whether there are any actual grounds for objection. First cousins frequently intermarry, live a happy married life, and have families of bright and healthy children. Many people would assert that the fact of their relationship makes first cousins better acquainted with each other's tastes, habits and temperaments.

MATHEMATICS.—In a parallelopipedon of brass, with a base one inch wide and one inch long, and with a height of one foot, there would be 900 strips of circular wire of the diameter of one-thirtieth of an inch and the length of one foot. A cubic foot would contain 144 times as many strips, or it would contain 129,600 strips, each one one foot in length. If these strips were laid out in a straight line the length would be 129,600 feet, and, considering them as one strip, there would be 43,200 yards of circular wire.

LOTTA.—There is certainly no harm in a girl kissing her relative on bidding him farewell, provided that the caress is bestowed before his father or her teacher. It depends upon circumstances. No girl should kiss in secret a man to whom she is not engaged. No. Obedience is the first law a woman should learn. She is a Spanish blonde. We can not say, so much depends upon the character of the paper which your guardian wishes you to discontinue reading. If its teachings are immoral or irreligious, then you should certainly give it up. If he has thoroughly examined the paper, and finds that this is its character, he cannot do otherwise than demand that you quit reading it.

NORA.—Is it not quite as possible that something you said or did upon that festive occasion of the "bet" either hurt or displeased him? You may have thoughtlessly shown a tendency to be frivolous or fast on that occasion. A man amuses himself with such a girl for a time, but he will not pay her serious or respectful attention. Don't condemn your girl friend unless you know she is guilty of treachery towards you. Wait patiently, and time may bring everything straight. The young man may have some reason for his dereliction which he will be able to explain. Do not act rashly. It is always best to wait and be sure.

ROSALIND.—The following lines by Charles Lamb, descriptive of the growth of a young love, we should think, will answer Rosalind's purpose very well:

"Ah! I remember well (and how can I
But evermore remember well!) when first
Our flame began, when scarce we knew what was
The flame we felt; when, as we sat and sighed,
And looked upon each other, and conceived—
Not what we allied—yet something we did all;
And yet were well, and yet we were not well,
And what was our disease we could not tell.
Then would we kiss, then sigh, then look, and thus
In that first garden of our simplicity
We spent our childhood. But when years began
To reap the fruit of knowledge, ah! how then
Would she with graver looks, with sweet-stern brow,
Check my presumption and my forwardness;
Yet still would give me flowers; still would she show
What she would have me, yet not have me know."

L. B. N.—To keep cider sweet, it is recommended to put into each keg eight tablespoonfuls of white mustard seed.

A. J. T.—The number of miles by water from New York to San Francisco is 15,558. To Cape Horn it is 8,115.

G. R.—Memnon was a celebrated Egyptian statue, supposed to have the property of emitting a harp-like sound at sunrise.

A. S. P.—The colour of the gloves worn by bride and groom must be the same. White gloves will be fashionable again this season.

R. D. H.—Fine solder is an alloy of two parts of block tin and one part of lead. Glazing solder is equal parts of block tin and lead. Plumbing solder is one part of block tin and two parts of lead.

E. G. T.—A fine red ink is made as follows: Cochineal, in powder, one ounce; hot water, half a pint; digest, and when cool, add spirits of hartshorn, a quarter of a pint. Dilute with three ounces of water. Macerate for four or five days, and decant the clear ink.

C. D. N.—Melon seeds are said to retain their vitality from eight to ten years; pumpkin and squash the same; turnip seeds from three to six; asparagus from two to three; and bean, carrot, celery, corn (on cob), onion, tomato, and parsnip the same. Egg plant from one to two years.

A. C. B.—One of the meanings of the word transpire is "to be emitted or sent off through the pores, or by insensible perspiration." In this sense it cannot be used in the same way as sweat, as the latter signifies that which passes visibly through the pores of the skin, or sensible perspiration.

THE HOME'S REWARD.

If when our path through trial lies,
And toil grows dull and hard,
And distant seemeth to our eyes
The harvest's sweet reward,
We do our duties without fear,
The recompense will soon appear

Day's trials over, gentle peace
The weary heart awaits,
As evening brings a glad release
And opens wide the gates
To home's tranquillity, the best
We know of quiet and of rest!

For there the day's perplexities
Should never enter in;
Nor ever break on joys like those
The world's confusing din,
Since Heaven's home on love bestowed
To be an unprofaned abode.

We think not of our toiling then,
While those we love are by,
And will to-morrow tread again
The ways where trials lie,
Nor halt, nor feel our duties hard,
In view of home, and home's reward.

W. B. D.

J. RAKER.—According to Herodotus, the historian, dentistry appears to have been practised in Egypt at a very early age in the world's history as a distinct branch of surgery. Artificial teeth of ivory and wood, some of which are fastened on gold plates, have been found in Egyptian tombs, and the teeth of some of the mummies display gold fittings. The old Greek and Latin poets, such as Ovid, Martial and Horace, allude to artificial teeth. The ancient modes of extracting teeth are not described or illustrated with any degree of clearness.

L. D. D.—Do not be misled into the idea that because the young man treats you with gentlemanly gallantry that he is in love with you, and cannot withstand your captivating graces. If such were the case, there seems no valid reason why he should not immediately propose marriage. Let him roam all over the field of acquaintanceship, and do not imagine that the matrimonial bride can be unknowingly slipped over his head. Display all your good qualities of temper and breeding, thus showing him that you are fit to become the wife of any good man, but for goodness sake desist from throwing yourself bodily at him at every opportunity. This latter course will alienate instead of attract the love of any man possessing a well-balanced mind.

N. W. W.—Having tired of the engagement binding you to the young man, it would be no more than honourable and ladylike to inform him of the change that has come over your feelings, and ask him to grant a release from a contract that has so soon proved irksome to one of the parties making it. It is a species of refined cruelty to accept a man's offer of marriage and then deliberately set it aside; but if he is anything of a philosopher he will accept the inevitable, and thank heaven that such a fickle creature has not drawn him into the matrimonial net beyond recovery. The one who is now basking in the sunshine of your favour will, it is to be devoutly hoped, teach you a lesson in playing fast and loose with the heart of a true man. From the description furnished he has already caused you to be very jealous, and in all probability will add to your discomfort by casting you aside whenever some more attractive female crosses his path. In other words, he will be simply paying you in your own coin.

G. G. W.—"Battle of the Standard" was a name given to an engagement between the English and Scotch at Northallerton, Yorkshire, August 23, 1138, resulting in the defeat of the latter. It was so called on account of a high crucifix borne by the English upon a waggon as a military ensign.

M. R. V.—Sedlitz water is the product of certain saline springs in Sedlitz, or Sedlitz, a village of Bohemia, near Bilen. To prepare an artificial Sedlitz water, dissolve from three quarters to one and a half ounces of sulphate of magnesia in three times its weight of water, and after filtering, introduce it into a bottle, to be filled with water charged with carbonic acid gas. As an aperient, it is effective and not disagreeable.

L. C. C.—To make rice muffins, boil a pint of rice until it becomes a thick mass, the grains no longer perceptible. Set it out to cool. Thin it by mixing with it two quarts of milk. Beat in a shallow pan four eggs, until very thick and light, and then stir them gradually into the rice and milk. Then give the whole a hard stirring. Butter some muffin-rings; fill them with the mixture, and bake. Split and butter the muffins while warm.

B. B.—Liberia, the Independent Negro Republic of Western Africa, was founded by the American Colonization Society in 1820. It has been recognised by the United States and the European Powers since 1847, as an independent State. The population consists of about 18,000 emigrants from America and their descendants, and aborigines, numbering in all about 1,050,000. It has a president, secretary of state, postmaster-general, and attorney-general.

L. L. M.—"The Silent Sister" was a name given to Trinity College, Dublin, on account of the little influence it exerted in proportion to its resources. Goldwin Smith said of it, "Trinity College itself held its ground and grew wealthy, only to deserve the name of 'The Silent Sister,' while its great endowments served effectually to indemnify it against the necessity of conforming to the conditions under which alone its example could be useful to the whole nation."

ROSINA.—An excellent article for the hands is sand-soap, a preparation of soap mixed with fine white sand. It is made by shaving down and melting some white soap, and then stirring into it, while warm, an equal quantity of the sand named. Put it, warm, into quince moulds, or roll portions of it, the mixture between the hands, so as to form balls. Set them in a dark place to dry gradually. This soap is not intended for the face or neck, but it will make the hands white and smoother.

C. C. H.—To take fruit stains out of white napkins, let them, as soon as taken from the table, be thrown into a large vessel of clean water. If hot water is at hand it will be better than cold. Leave them to soak during the remainder of the day. Then take them out and put them where they will dry. If any stains remain, wet the stains with hot water, and then rub on some lemon juice, or salts of lemon, washing it off as soon as it has removed the stain. Cream of tartar will sometimes answer the purpose. It is very hard to get a stain out of any sort of linen after it has been previously washed in soap.

M. L. P. H.—1. If you are writing to a relative, or to an intimate friend, and have much to say, and expect to fill the sheet, begin near the top of the first page; but if your letter is to be a short one, commence lower down, or several inches from the top. If it is to be a letter of only a few lines, begin a little above the middle of the page. 2. It is customary to date letters at the top, and notes at the bottom. 3. If you send the letter by a private opportunity, it will be sufficient to introduce, close to the lower edge of the left hand corner on the back, simply the name of the gentleman who takes it, written small.

JOSEPH.—Margaret Haughey was the name of the famous woman to whom a statue has been erected in New Orleans. Her husband and little child died just after her arrival in that city. She began her business and benevolent career by selling milk in a cart about the city. Subsequently she established a bakery. At her death it was found she had left no personal effects of value—all her earnings had been disposed of in charities for the poor and deserving. It is said that the Charity Hospital was largely the gift of Margaret. Among other memorable enterprises she established the Children's Home. The statue was a gift of the city. It is described as very like Margaret, who is seated with one arm encircling a standing child at her side.

THE LONDON READER, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS AND VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 320, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LI., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 234, Strand, W.C.

WE cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by J. R. SPECK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KIDDER, 70 to 74, Long Acre, W.C.